

NOTES ON A MEETING OF THE ENVIRONMENT WORKING GROUP (EWG)
25th February 2025 via Teams

Attendees: Cllrs John Turner (JT) (Chair), Paul Curry (PC), Jade Dickens (JD) and Rebecca Leach (RL), with Ken Howes (KH), Ed Langridge (EL) and Lizzie Pannell (LP).

In Attendance: Catherine Barrett (CB), Assistant Clerk.

Apologies: Kay Dooley (KD) & Alan Ford (AF).

- 1. To ask members for their consent to record the meeting to aid the production of meeting notes**
Members consented to the meeting being recorded by CB using the Teams recording function for the accuracy of the minutes. She would delete the recording after the next EWG meeting.

2. Confirm working group membership

JT advised that Cllr Domenico Tarricone had stepped down from the EWG, and would be replaced by PC. JT welcomed PC to the group.

KH said he would need to consider his membership going forward, but would continue as long as he could.

JD, RL, EL, and LP confirmed they would continue as Members.

3. Review the EWG's Terms of Reference (ToR) and the Council Environment Policy

- It was **RESOLVED** to recommend to Full Council that the ToR be amended to state that a review of the ToR would take place every 3 years, unless the EWG changed significantly, in which case the ToR would be updated immediately.
- It was **RESOLVED** to recommend the same change be made to the council's Environment Policy.
- There was some discussion on the following points:
 - JD said there was no Term of Reference about improving energy efficiency in council-owned buildings, such as Langton Green Pavilion, although it was noted that there was a general reference point for reducing the carbon footprint of the parish. JD added that her professional background was in the building industry, and she was keen to champion energy efficiency. JT thanked her, and it was agreed that **JD would share some options for reducing energy loss at the next meeting.**
 - KH said there was no reference to how much the EWG could contribute to decisions that would have a significant impact on the environment, for example, large-scale planning application. KH had been concerned by the insufficient preparation and poor quality of discussion by some borough councillors when the TWBC Planning Committee had met to discuss a recent application and would like to help ensure that the parish council was doing everything it could as a planning consultee to have an impact on the outcome of future applications of this nature.

It was noted that all applications now needed to meet the conditions of Biodiversity Net Gain as a material consideration. PC explained to KH that he was the parish council's Planning Committee Vice-Chair, and that although the committee tried hard to spot environmental issues when considering planning applications, they were only consultees who did not have the core skills to assess biodiversity net gain reports. He thought it would be possible for the EWG to add comments to significant applications going forward,

although there were questions to be answered about how this would be done. Would the EWG look out for these types of applications, or would the Planning Committee ask the EWG to comment when they felt it necessary? It was agreed that, as a start, **JT would prepare an additional recommendation for the ToR**, stating that for any large-scale planning applications with potential environmental impact, the EWG would be able to provide input.

4. An overview of action points and updates from the previous meeting on 30th July 2024

The action points would be included for discussion as part of the relevant agenda items.

5. Financial Review

The balance at the last meeting had been £972.00. Since then, an expenditure of £1800.31 had been spent on tree and hedge planting. Once £1300.00 funding had been received from Sussex Lund, the balance would be £471.69.

The budget for the financial year 2025/6 had been set at £650.00.

6. An update on the weed control trial at Langton Green Recreation Ground

- Following a trial of various non-Glyphosate-based weed control methods during the 2023 season, it was concluded that Natural Roundup was the most effective method, used in conjunction with strimming in some areas and less aggressive weed control in general (weed control would only be carried out where there was a health and safety risk or risk of damage to concreted areas).

CB had circulated a comparison of the cost of Natural Roundup and the cost of Glyphosate-based products. The cost of Natural Roundup for the 2024 growing season was £100.00 more than the cost of Glyphosate-based products in 2022. However, it was £30.00 less than the cost of various non-Glyphosate products trialled in 2023.

CB said there had been a reduction in mowing costs since the parish council had adopted reduced mowing at Pocket Park, which could be said to balance out the increase of weed control costs. She added that there had not been an increase in labour costs, since the Groundsman was undertaking a less intensive form of weed control.

CB advised that the cost of Natural Roundup seemed to be gradually decreasing as it became more widely available. She said that following a successful trial in 2024 it would also be easier to estimate how much Natural Roundup to order for 2025 and bulk-buying would avoid additional delivery costs.

- It was noted that the continuation of Glyphosate usage in the UK was due for review in December 2025.
- It was **RESOLVED** that **JT would recommend the continued use of non-glyphosate-based weed control at Langton Green Recreation Ground** at the next Full Council meeting.

7. An update on EV Charger usage in Langton Green Village Hall car park

Kent County Council (KCC) had sent through usage figures for review, and these were circulated. JT said there were an average of 10 users a month. He confirmed that KCC paid for the upkeep of the chargers and received the income from users. PC said he had found the increase in session length in November 2024 interesting and wondered if this was a resident who had bought an EEV but did not yet have a charger at home.

8. An update on re-wilding activities at Pocket Park, Speldhurst, including:

JT paid tribute to AF, who had given invaluable help in developing the park and documenting progress during the last 3 years. He recapped progress as follows:

- The central patch of grass had now been left to grow for 3 growing seasons. AF had regularly inspected and photographed new species of plant and animal life in the rewilded area and worked with CB to build a biodiversity archive.
- Common Spotted Orchids had been donated to the park by a resident.
- The invasive Laurel, which had begun to take over the park, had been removed during a 12–18-month period. JT and KD had planted replacement Rowan and Crab trees in October 2024. At the same time, JT had sown wildflower seeds.
- The hedging that bordered Penshurst Road was originally made up of unstable Yew Tree trunks with lots of gaps. New native hedge plants had been planted in November 2024 to fill in the gaps. These would provide an extra layer of biodiversity.
- Bird boxes had been installed by AF and JT.
- Logs had been added to provide bug hotels.
- A noticeboard had been installed to be updated twice a year.
- Funding had been obtained from Sussex Lund, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and Tesco to complete projects.

JT said that while it was now a case of maintaining what had already been put in place in the park, more could be done to drive community engagement, and he asked for ideas.

- JD asked if Thrive Langton would be interested in helping in the park. It was agreed that **RL would speak to them about this.**
- EL suggested an archaeological dig and an open day.
- **LP would speak to the primary schools again.**
- **JT would speak to AF about what more could be done in the park.**
- **JT and CB would work together on the next noticeboard update.**

9. A discussion about how the EWG can contribute to the council's environment-themed Annual Parish Meeting (APM)

The APM would take place from 7.00 pm on Monday, 19th May 2025 at Ashurst Village Hall.

The Speakers would be Rhodri Jones, Tree Officer, and David Scully, Landscape and Biodiversity Officer at Tunbridge Wells Borough Council.

JT asked if any EWG members could volunteer to help with a display of photos of Pocket Park. It was agreed that **LP would help JT with this.**

10. A discussion about what is next for the EWG

- The Pond at The Boundary, Langton Green – JT said that after a risk assessment by KD and CB, the Amenities Committee was now scheduling work to make the pond safe and undertake essential maintenance. He asked if there was an appetite among Members to begin a biodiversity project at this location. After some discussion, it was agreed to wait until the essential works had been completed before deciding what to do. It was noted that the pond was overlooked by three houses in The Boundary, and it was important to communicate any plans to residents. Also, the cost of any project should be considered.

- Tree Planting – EL said that the funding and principles of the tree-planting scheme in Langton Green had worked well, but there had not been sufficient follow-up to establish whether residents' trees were still thriving. EL asked if the council could follow up on this with an article in Langton Life.

RL said it would be cheaper to focus on encouraging residents to establish a small area for wildflowers and provide small bags of wildflower seeds for each household. It was agreed that patience was needed and the correct guidelines given for this, as rewilded areas could take more than one growing season to establish. It was agreed that **RL and EL would work together on promoting this initiative.** CB reminded members that there were lots of learning points

available from the rewilding of Pocket Park, which could be used, and she would be happy to share examples from the biodiversity archive.

KH said he would like to see the parish council monitor the planting of replacement trees where planning permission had been given by TWBC for a tree with a TPO to be felled. There was some discussion about how this could be done. It was agreed that **CB would speak to the Planning Clerk about a process for monitoring TPO tree-felling applications and following up to see if residents had complied.** And **PC would try to find out more information about current TPO tree felling applications for KH.** It was noted that the Planning Committee did have an agenda item for compliance issues, but it was not possible to follow up on every application. It was more likely that a councillor or parish resident would notice when it was clear that building work had not complied. TWBC was the correct authority to take action on compliance issues, so any course of action taken by the parish council would only be informal.

- Working with neighbouring parish councils – **JB would talk to other parish councils, such as Rusthall and Withyham,** to ask what they were doing around the environment and whether they would be interested in partnering.
- Recycling – **CB would share LP's recycling tips again via the website, social media and parish magazines.**

11. Items for Full Council

- Amendments to ToR and Policy.
- Continuation of non-Glyphosate weed control at Langton Green Recreation Ground.

12. Items for Information

CB would let Members know the next meeting date.

With nothing further to discuss, the meeting ended at 8.54 pm.

Summary of Action Points

No.	Summary	Owner	Created	Status
01/24	Arrange a meeting with JT to assess the usage of EV chargers. Chase quarterly usage statistics from KCC	CB	14/02/24	Complete
03/24	Get pricing for Whips to use as replacement hedging at Pocket Park	CB/JT	14/02	Complete
06/24	Follow up with LGVS on the success of their tree planting initiative and bring TWBC tree cover study to the next meeting	EL	14/02	Closed
07/24	Carry out a risk assessment at the parish council pond in Langton Green	CB/KD	30/07	Complete
08/24	Get quotes and arrange replacement trees at Pocket Park	CB/JT	30/07	Complete
09/24	Arrange a meeting at Pocket Park to establish work to be done in the Autumn	CB/JT/AF	30/07	Complete
12/23	Approach primary schools to get them involved with Pocket Park, Speldhurst	LP/CB	25/02/25	TBA

01/25	Research some options for reducing energy loss in LG Pavilion to share at the next meeting.	JD	25/02/25	TBA
02/25	Recommend changes to Tor and Environment Policy at next Full Council Meeting	JT	25/02/25	TBA
03/25	Recommend the continued use of non-glyphosate-based weed control at Langton Green Recreation Ground at the next Full Council meeting.	JT	25/02/25	TBA
04/25	Speak to Thrive Langton about helping with work at Pocket Park	RL	25/02/25	TBA
05/25	Action ongoing work at Pocket Park eg, instruct mowing contractor, update noticeboard, site inspection, check new hedging and trees.	JT/AF/CB	25/02/25	TBA
06/25	Prepare Pocket Park photo display for APM on 19 th May	JT/CB/LP	25/02/25	TBA
07/25	Work on wildflower planting initiative, encouraging residents to have a rewilded area.	EL/RL	25/02/25	TBA
08/25	Investigate process for monitoring TPO tree-felling applications	CB/PC	25/02/25	TBA
09/25	Talk to neighbouring p-c's about partnering on environmental projects and sharing info.	JT	25/02/25	TBA
10/25	Share Recycling Tips again	CB	25/02/25	TBA
11/25	Circulate the next meeting date	CB	25/02/25	TBA