

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE PARISH COUNCIL OF LONGDON HELD
IN THE W.I. HALL, LONGDON, ON TUESDAY, DECEMBER 13TH, 2011

Present

Cllr. Mrs. G. D. Duckett (Chairman); Cllr. B. J. Butler; Cllr. R. A. G. Clarke;
Cllr. P. M. Couchman; Cllr. A. J. Juxon; Cllr. Mrs. H. A. Meere;
Cllr. M. J. Nash; and Cllr. S. K. Welch.

Also present were the Clerk; County Councillor F. W. Lewis, MBE; and
Mrs. Clare Eggington, Principal Development Plans Officer, Lichfield
District Council.

1. APOLOGIES

Cllr. C. D. Cherry; Cllr. K. C. Taylor; and Cllr. N. J. Roberts, Lichfield
District Council.

2. REVIEW OF CURRENT PRACTICES AGAINST RISK ASSESSMENT
REGISTER

It was agreed that current practices would be reviewed against the Council's risk
assessment register during the course of the meeting.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

On a motion proposed by Cllr. Juxon and seconded by Cllr. Welch, the minutes of
the previous meeting, held in the Cannock Wood and Gentleshaw Village Hall, Buds
Road, Cannock Wood, on Tuesday, November 8th, 2011, were approved and signed.

4. TALK BY CLARE EGGINGTON, PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS
OFFICER, LICHFIELD DISTRICT COUNCIL, ON THE LOCALISM BILL

The Chairman welcomed Mrs. Eggington to the meeting and invited her to address
the Council (*Appendix A*).

Mrs. Eggington then gave a talk on the recently-enacted Localism Bill and
the opportunities and challenges which it presented to local government authorities.

5. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

(i) Retaining Wall at Grange Hill

It was reported that the protective fencing had now been taken away.

(ii) 2 Byron Court

The Clerk reported that he had spoken to Gareth Davies, Principal Environmental Health Officer, Lichfield District Council, who had confirmed that no new tenancies had been registered.

(iii) Gentleshaw Green

Cllr. Welch reported that he had had further discussions regarding the screening of the wall at the back of the Green with Adrian Bevan, who had recommended planting decent-sized hornbeams.

Between eight and ten would be needed, costing £30. 00 each, and they should be planted in March.

(iv) Parish Website

The Clerk reported that he had received from Eric Roy, the Council's webmaster, a letter dated 25th November 2011 noting two small variations agreed in a telephone conversation with Cllr. Clarke, namely, (a) that the original thirty days of test service offered was extended up to sixty days in recognition of the fact that, in the absence of Cllr. Cherry, progress might not be as rapid as the Parish Council had hoped and (b) that, given that the Christmas holiday season was approaching and he (that is, Mr. Roy) had a full work load, the original target to complete the revised pages for review was extended from four to six weeks.

Mr. Roy had enclosed with his letter an invoice for £200. 00 as a deposit to confirm the order for the creation of revised web pages. The Clerk reminded the Council that Mr. Roy's quote of £670. 00 for updating the parish website had not yet been formally accepted, and it was agreed that it should be accepted at the January meeting.

Cllr. Clarke reported that, to date, there had been fifteen responses from local organisations and businesses to the forty-six letters sent, and it was agreed that those who wanted their entries to remain unchanged should be asked to say so.

Cllr. Clarke pointed out that the more preparatory work that he and Cllr. Cherry could do, the lower the cost to the Council.

(v) Inappropriate Parking in Ford Lane

The Clerk reported that this was one of the highway issues which he had discussed with Helen Portman, and that he now awaited an email from her confirming the position.

(vi) Identity Cards

Only Cllr. Juxon had brought a photograph, while Cllr. Butler, assured that identity cards were not obligatory, said that he would prefer not to be issued with one.

(vii) Community Paths Initiative

The Chairman reminded Councillors that it was imperative to have the footpath project completed before 31st March 2012 if the Council were not to forfeit the grant awarded to it under the Community Paths Initiative and she asked for those Councillors who had been writing texts for the leaflets to forward them to Cllr. Juxon, who would then provide the sketches.

(viii) Signage at Brereton Hill

The Clerk reported that, following Cllr. Lewis's intervention, he had received a phone call from Richard Rayson, Community Highway Liaison Manager, who had told him that he would investigate the problem

(ix) Potholes in Borough Lane

Cllr. Juxon reported that the potholes in Borough Lane had just been repaired, though he was concerned that the lane had been closed without warning, and it appeared that a water pipe had been damaged during the work.

(x) Request from St. James School for sign on A51

The Clerk reported that he had received from Tim Buxton, Traffic Management Technician, Community Highway Liaison, Staffordshire County Council, an email dated 15th November 2011, informing him that schools would only be considered for signing if there were location difficulties, the reason for limiting the signing being that, if all establishments within the County were signed, there would be a proliferation of signs.

In his opinion, in view of its close location to the A51, St. James School would not qualify.

(xi) Footpath No. 1 - Damaged Footpath Sign

The Clerk reported that he had reported the damaged footpath sign to the Rights of Way Department of Staffordshire County Council and had, in reply, received a letter from Dominic Willmore, dated , advising him that

Cllr. Nash reported that the sign had now been replaced.

(xii) Beaudesert Sports Field and Recreation Ground Trust

The Clerk reported that he had received from John Tonks, Treasurer, Beaudesert Sports Field and Recreation Ground Trust, a letter postmarked 15th November 2011, thanking the Council for its grant of £100.00 towards the cost of new goal posts on the sports field.

(xiii) Licensing of the Rev. Janet Waterfield

The Clerk reported that he had received from Janet Grew, Churchwarden, St. James Church, Longdon, an email inviting Councillors to the licensing of the Rev. Janet Waterfield as Priest-in-Charge of St. James, on January 4th, 2012.

He had, as Mrs. Grew had requested, forwarded this invitation to Councillors to enable each Councillor to return his or her reply direct to Mrs. Grew.

(xiv) Kicking-rail along verge outside No. 71 Upper Way, Upper Longdon

The Clerk reported that he had sent an email to Richard Rayson, Community Highway Liaison Manager, reminding him that a year had passed since he first proposed replacing the bollards along the verge outside this property with a kicking-rail and asking whether this work was likely to be carried out in the near future.

He had also asked whether a contribution towards the cost from the Parish Council would expedite the work.

6. PLANNING MATTERS

(i) Report of Working Group

11/01188/FUL: Mr. & Mrs. Burt: Removal of condition No. 10 of application 10/00390/COU relating to the occupancy (so as to enable the outbuilding at Rookery Farm to be used, sold or let as a separate dwelling unit): Rookery Farm, Giddywell Lane, Longdon

The Council had questioned whether there had been any change in circumstance which justified this application.

It was also noted that there was concern amongst neighbours at the proposed change.

(ii) For Consideration

11/01171/FUL: Lichfield Cathedral School: Two-storey extension to provide classrooms, assembly hall and reception areas: Lichfield Cathedral School, Church Hill, Longdon Green

In considering this application, the Council noted that the development would replace temporary buildings occupying the site (to whose continued presence the Council had objected) and that it would not lead to a radical alteration in the shape of the building nor to an excessive increase in its footprint.

Moreover, no neighbour would be overlooked.

11/01289/FUL: Mr. N. Brown: Construction of new access driveway to existing dwelling: The Cottage, Hay lane, Longdon Green

The Council noted that there was clearly a practical need for this driveway and that, in addition, there were already three such driveways which crossed the Green.

11/01315/FUL: Mr. M. Bailey: Single-storey rear extension and internal alterations: 55 Upper Way, Upper Longdon

There were no objections to this development.

(iii) Approved by Lichfield District Council

The Clerk reported that, since the last meeting, Lichfield District Council had issued the following Notices of Approval of Planning Permission:

11/00783/FULM: Windmill Farm c/o Agent Fisher German LLP, Ashby-de-la-Zouch: Erection of agricultural building: Land at rear of Windmill Farm, Stockings Lane, Longdon

11/01081/FUL: Mr. B. Thompson: Demolition of existing extensions and erection of a conservatory: Huntsmans House, 11 Upper Way, Upper Longdon

(iv) Refused by Lichfield District Council

The Clerk reported that, since the last meeting, Lichfield District Council had issued no Notices of Refusal of Planning Permission relating to the Parish of Longdon.

(v) Other Planning Matters

There were no other planning matters to be considered.

7. REPORTS OF MEETINGS

(i) Police Surgery: November 12th

Cllr. Clarke gave a brief report on the police surgery which had taken place in Longdon Village Hall on Saturday, November 12th, 2011.

A number of traffic issues had been raised, including parking in Ford Lane and speeding in Borough Lane and along the A51.

As a consequence, PCSO Anderson had visited Brook End and asked parents to remove vehicles which had been parked inconsiderately.

She had reminded these parents that they were, in fact, breaking the law.

She had also asked the School to reinforce this message.

Speed checks on the A51 by a mobile speed camera had not revealed a problem.

(ii) Cannock Wood & Gentleshaw Village Hall Management Committee

The Clerk reported that, when giving his apologies, Cllr. Taylor had also asked him to make a brief report on his behalf on a meeting of the Cannock Wood and Gentleshaw Village Hall Management Committee which had taken place on Monday, November 28th, 2011.

Cllr. Taylor had been very impressed by his first attendance as the Parish Council's representative, describing the meeting as "well organised".

The main item of business had been the provision and maintenance of car parking both at the Village Hall and outside the School and in the roads beyond, for which they were looking for a system of control.

A system similar to those in place at hospitals had been suggested, though nothing had been finalised.

The problem caused by parking by parents delivering to or collecting their children from the School had become acute and was causing anger amongst the residents of Buds Road, some of whom were finding their driveways blocked.

As a consequence, PCSO Anderson had become involved and had warned some parents that they were breaking the law.

(iii) Lichfield Community and Voluntary Support Sector (“Volunteer Voice”):
Tuesday, December 13th

Cllr. Clarke reported that he had, that day, attended a meeting of the Lichfield Community and Voluntary Support Sector, at which those attending had been invited to give two-minute talk on the achievements of their particular sector.

Though he had not been forewarned, he had given an impromptu talk about the computer course which he had organised.

8. NOTICE OF MEETING

(i) Highways and Open Spaces Committee: January 3rd, 2012

Members of the Committee were reminded that there would be a meeting of the Council’s Highways and Open Spaces Committee in the W. I. Hall, Longdon, on Tuesday, January 3rd, 2012, commencing at 7. 00 p.m.

9. HIGHWAYS AND FOOTPATHS

(i) Grit Bins

The Clerk reported that he had received from Sue Perry, Customer Support, The Parking Shop, Castle Ashby, an email dated December 2nd, 2011, reminding the Council that weather forecasters had warned of heavy snowfalls and attaching details of her company’s grit bins.

The Clerk further reported that he had received from Mrs. Richard Totty, of Redhill, Upper Longdon, an email dated December 6th, 2011, informing him that the grit bin on the junction of Horsey Lane and Bardy Lane was empty and needed filling.

He had forwarded Mr. Totty’s email to the Highways Department at Lichfield.

10. GREENS AND OPEN SPACES

(i) Request for two half-barrel flower tubs for Beech Walk

On a motion proposed by Cllr. Welch and seconded by Cllr. Butler, it was agreed that the Clerk should purchase half-barrel flower tubs as replacements for two dilapidated tubs in Beech Walk.

(ii) Report from Graham McCulloch

The Clerk reported that he had received from Graham McCulloch, the Council's mowing contractor, a report dated confirming that he had completed the treework commissioned by the Council.

He had quoted £140. 00 for further treework, including the removal of a fallen but hanging tree on Brook End Green.

On a motion proposed by Cllr. Welch and seconded by Cllr. Butler, it was agreed that Mr. McCulloch should be asked to carry out this work at the quoted price.

11. GENERAL ADMINISTRATION

(i) Approval of changes to Standing Orders

On a motion proposed by Cllr. Nash and seconded by Cllr. Butler, the changes to the Council's Standing Orders recommended by the Council's Finance and General Purposes Committee were approved and adopted.

(ii) Approval of changes to Grant Application Form

On a motion proposed by Cllr. Clarke and seconded by Cllr. Welch, the changes to the Council's Grant Application Form recommended by the Council's Finance and General Purposes Committee were approved and adopted.

(iii) Final Arrangements for Community Assembly

On a motion proposed by Cllr. Butler and seconded by Cllr. Couchman, it was agreed that the first Community Assembly should take place on Tuesday, January 19th, 2012, commencing at 7. 30 p.m. However, Councillors could not agree that it should take place at "The Swan with Two Necks", the Chairman's choice, Cllr. Juxon suggesting that this would not be the right venue for a structured meeting, and, on a motion proposed by Cllr. Juxon and seconded by Cllr. Mrs. Meere, it was agreed that the meeting should instead take place in the W. I. Hall.

It was agreed that the primary concern of the meeting should be arrangements to celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, but it was also hoped that the meeting would also provide the opportunity for local organisations to discuss mutual problems and exchange ideas.

The Clerk was instructed to write to local organisations, outlining the purpose of the Assembly and inviting them each to send a representative.

It was also agreed that a complimentary glass of wine should be offered to each representative upon arrival.

(iv) Parish Pre-meeting Surgeries

It was agreed that the first of these should take place on Tuesday, January 10th, 2011, in the W. I. Hall, Longdon and should run from 7. 00 p.m. to 7. 30 p.m.

The Chairman and Cllr. Butler would be in attendance.

12. LAW AND ORDER

(i) Joint Operations Group

The Clerk reported that he had not received a report from the Joint Operations Group for a number of months now.

(ii) Neighbourhood Watch

Cllr. Clarke reported that a number of groups had been formed in Longdon in recent weeks, and he would let the Clerk have a list of co-ordinators.

13. FINANCIAL MATTERS

(i) Accounts for Payment

On a motion proposed by Cllr. Mrs. Duckett and seconded by Cllr. Juxon, payment of the following accounts was approved:

*Instaprint, Rugeley	Printing 700 copies of "Longdon Life"	£490. 00
*Hazel Crosbie	Delivering "Longdon Life"	£ 45. 00
*A. J. Juxon	Editor's Expenses	£ 15. 00
Eric Roy	Deposit to confirm order for creation of revised web pages as per proposal dated 27 th April 2011 and subsequent emails and letter	£200. 00
W. B. Sullivan	Clerk's Salary	£280. 00
HM Revenue & Customs	Employers Tax	£ 70. 00
W. B. Sullivan	<u>Clerk's Expenses</u> Photocopying: £133. 73 Postage: £ 35. 48	£169. 21
Longdon W. I.	Hire of Hall – December 13 th	£ 12. 00
Alan Toplis Associates	Professional services: £84. 50 VAT: £16. 90	£101 40
G. C. McCulloch	Treework	£180.00

(*confirmation #payment made under section 137)

(ii) Payments Received

The Clerk reported that, since the last meeting, the following payment had been received:

John Twinning Advertisement: "Longdon Life" £ 5.00

(iii) Request for Grant Aid(a) Cruse Bereavement Care: South Staffordshire Area

The Clerk reported that he had received from Maureen Hillman, a member of the Funding Committee of South Staffordshire Cruse, a letter dated 14th November 2011, asking the Council if it would make a donation towards the work of the charity.

The letter had been accompanied by a completed Grant Application Form.

On a motion proposed by Cllr. Welch and seconded by Cllr. Juxon, it was agreed that a donation of £50.00 should be made to the charity, which the Council had previously supported.

(b) Open Spaces Society

The Clerk reported that he had received from Richard Mabey, Vice-president of the Open Spaces Society, a letter dated 28th November 2011, asking for contribution towards the Society's campaign to oppose the Government's proposed new Local Green Space designation and its proposed changes to the law for registering land as town or village greens.

However, it was decided that such a grant would bring no benefit to the Parish.

(iv) Current Balances

The Clerk reported that, currently, the Council's balances stood as follows:

NatWest c/a:	£435.07	The Halifax s/a:	£7032.27
<u>less uncleared cheques</u>			
	1660: £ 12.00		
	1663: £180.00		
	<u>1666: £ 15.00</u>		
	£222.07		

(v) Interim Report of Independent Internal Auditor

The Clerk reported that Alan Toplis, the Council's Independent Internal Auditor, had carried out an interim inspection of the Parish Council's accounts for the current financial year on November 17th had found them to be in a satisfactory state.

(vi) Parish Precept 2012/2013

The Clerk reported that he had received from Graham Keatley, Financial Services Manager, Lichfield District Council, an email dated December 2nd, 2011, attaching a Precept Analysis Form and asking for its return no later than January 20th, 2012.

It was agreed that this should be put on the agenda of the next meeting, when the Clerk would have had the opportunity of presenting the financial statement for the first three quarters of the current financial year.

14. CORRESPONDENCE SINCE LAST MEETING

Correspondence received since the last meeting had been dealt with under "Matters Arising".

15. OTHER COMMUNICATIONS

The Clerk reported that he had, in addition to correspondence previously noted, received the following communications:

- (i) From Heather Gibbons, Democratic and Legal Services Officer, Democratic, Development and Legal Services, Lichfield District Council:

Calendar of Meetings, fortnight ending 20th November 2011;
Revised Calendar of Meetings, fortnight ending 20th November 2011;
Calendar of Meetings, fortnight ending 4th December 2011;
Revised Calendar of Meetings, fortnight ending 4th December 2011;
Calendar of Meetings, fortnight ending 18th December 2011;
Forward Plan –Version 1 – Issued 16. 11. 2011 – Effective for Period
01. 12. 2011 – 31 – 03 – 2012;

- (ii) From Sally Duckett, Licensing Officer, Democratic, Development and Legal Services, Lichfield District Council:

Licensing Act Application registered during w/e 11th November 2011;
Licensing Act Applications registered during w/e 18th November 2011;
Licensing Act Applications registered during w/e 25th November 2011;
Licensing Act Applications registered during w/e 2nd December 2011.

- (iii) From Ruth Plant, Director, Operational Services, Lichfield District Council:

Helping us to shape Lichfield District's Carbon Reduction Plan;
Lichfield Draft Carbon Reduction Plan – October 2011.

- (iv) From Jan. Wright, Administration Assistant, Lichfield & District CVS:

S3SN – E Bulletin – Issue No. 37/11 – 3rd November 2011;
S3SN – E Bulletin – Issue No. 38/11 – 10th November 2011;
S3SN – E Bulletin – Issue No. 39/11 – 17th November 2011;
S3SN – E Bulletin – Issue No. 40/11 – 24th November 2011;

S3SN – E Bulletin – Issue No. 41/11 – 1st December 2011.

(v) From The Staffordshire Parish Councils' Association:

Re-run Chairmanship Skills Training Course;
The Queen Elizabeth II Fields Challenge – Save a Space for Me;
Staffordshire District Integrated Transport Strategies Consultation;
SPCA Update (16th November 2011);
SPCA Update (23rd November 2011);
Possible Funding;
Internet Forum for Council Allotment Officers;
Vacancy for Clerk to Berkswich Parish Council;
Vacancy for Clerk to Wigginton and Hopwas Parish Council;
Staffordshire County Council Briefing – November 2011;

Letter from Cllr. Matthew Ellis, Cabinet Member, Adults' Wellbeing,
Staffordshire County Council, re: extended consultation deadline to
NHS/Social Care;
NALC Update (8th December 2011);
SPCA Update (8th December 2011).

(vi) From The National Association of Local Councils:

“LCR”: Winter 2011

(vii) From Staffordshire Police:

“Partners send out a sobering message”
(Operation Safer Nights).

(viii) From The Community Council of Staffordshire

Members Newsletter – Autumn 2011.

(ix) From The Secretary, Beaudesert Sports Field and Recreation Ground Trust:

Minutes of meeting held on Monday, October 31st, 2011

(x) From The Historic Towns Forum:

Newsletter – November 2011.

(xi) From Marie Hitchen/Martin Taylor, Sustainable Gov.:

“Preventing data leakage in public services”;
“Osborne vows to reassess private finance initiative”;
“Is Osborne’s £30 million infrastructure boost enough to kick-start
Britain’s flagging economy?”.

(xii) From The Ordnance Survey:

An update from Sir Ian Magee, Chair of the CGI Group, to all PSMA members.

(xiii) From David Pott, Two Saints Way Project:

Christmas greetings.

(xiv) From Sustainable Options (Barkson Limited, Leeds):

Making Sustainable Commercial Sense

(xv) From SMP Playgrounds Ltd., Egham, Surrey:

“Have your cake and eat it!”
“Last Chance to treat yourself!”

(xvi) From Safe & Sound Playgrounds, Aylesbury, Bucks.:

Designer Playgrounds.

(xvii) From Mike Henson, Managing Director, parishcouncilwebsite.net:

More than just a website.

(xviii) From Notts Sport, Lutterworth, Leics.:

Reviving your old playground is more affordable than you think.

(xix) From Insignia Ltd., Wallington, Surrey:

Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Commemorative Items.

(xx) From HAGS Play Ltd., Sturminster Newton, Dorset:

“But the Agito unit and get the surfacing and installation FREE!”

16. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

- (i) The Clerk reported that Cllr. Taylor had received a request from a resident of Lower Way to have the properties, at present distinguished only by name, numbered. Apparently, a visiting nurse had found it difficult to locate her property. The Clerk said that he would make enquiries, but thought that single request would not be sufficient to set this process in progress.

(ii) Cllr. Clarke asked whether there had been any response to his suggestion that meetings of the Parish Council might be video-conferenced in the future event of a member of the Council facing lengthy absence due to illness.

The Clerk replied that he had discussed the possibility with a District Council officer, who had pointed out that not even the District Council had such facilities, adding that he thought that there would be legal issues to resolve.

(iii) Cllr. Mrs. Meere asked whether a suggestions book might be placed in each of the public houses in the Parish.

However, Councillors doubted the value of such an initiative, and it was pointed out that the Council was about to introduce pre-meeting surgeries to encourage more public involvement in parish affairs.

(iv) The Chairman informed the Council that she had received a telephone call from a resident of Longdon Green who had expressed an interest in joining the Council,

She had arranged to meet him so that she could inform him of the responsibilities which he would be undertaking.

The Clerk pointed out that the vacancy which existed was for a Councillor for the Gentleshaw Ward, though no parishioner resident in Gentleshaw had come forward.

17. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Tuesday, January 10th, 2012, in the W. I. Hall, Longdon, commencing at 7. 30 p.m.

Appendix A

SUMMARY OF TALK BY CLARE EGGINGTON, PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS OFFICER, DEMOCRATIC, DEVELOPMENT AND LEGAL SERVICES, LICHFIELD DISTRICT COUNCIL, ON THE LOCALISM ACT

Mrs. Eggington began with a planning update on Localism:

The Draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) has been out to consultation until October 17th, 2011, and the final version is now awaited. It is expected to be published in Spring 2012.

The main issues were:

- Each local authority is to produce a Local Plan for its area. Ongoing work by Lichfield District Council on the Core Strategy of its Local Development Plan is still relevant, and evidence is being updated.
- The Local Plan should be ‘aspirational but realistic’ and should ‘address the spatial implications of economic, social and environmental change...(and) should set out opportunities for development and clear guidance of what would or would not be permitted and where’.
- The presumption is ‘in favour of sustainable development’.
- Local Plans need to ‘reflect the vision and aspiration of local communities’.
- They must be positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy.

The draft NPPF gives the communities ‘direct power to plan the areas in which they live’ by preparing their own neighbourhood plans. The Government is currently consulting on the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations, the closing date of the consultation period being 5th January 2012.

The draft NPPF says that Neighbourhood Plans can be used to:

- develop a shared vision for a neighbourhood
- set planning policies for the development and use of land
- give planning permission through Neighbourhood Development orders and Community Right to Build orders

There will be a formal procedure to follow; Neighbourhood Plans must be assessed by an independent examiner and must then go to a local referendum. Neighbourhood Plans must:

- have regard to the policies in the National Planning Policy Framework
- be in general conformity with the strategic policies in the Local Plan
- be compatible with relevant EU obligations and human rights requirements

Other, less formal options to consider could be a Parish Plan (new or updated) or a village plan, or some way of capturing the needs and aspirations of the local community.

Lichfield District Council has plenty of evidence already to hand for anyone to use by going to www.lichfielddc.gov.uk/evidence and www.lichfielddc.gov.uk/ruralplanning. The Community Council of Staffordshire also offer support and guidance; simply go to <http://www.staffs.org.uk> or contact Andy Halden by email (communitycouncil@staffs.org.uk) or phone (01785 242525).

Turning to The Localism Bill, Mrs. Eggington said that, following agreement by both Houses on the text of the Bill, it had received Royal Assent on 15th November 2011 and had now passed into law as an Act of Parliament.

Summarising the Bill, she said that it would devolve greater powers to councils and neighbourhoods and give local communities more control over housing and planning decisions.

Outlining its key areas, she said that the provisions relating to councils include

- giving councils a general power of competence
- allowing councils to choose to return to the committee system of governance and allowing for referendums for elected mayors in certain authorities
- abolishing the Standards Board regime and the model code of conduct, and introducing local accountability and a criminal offence of deliberate failure to declare a personal interest in a matter
- giving residents the power to instigate local referendums on any local issue and the power to veto excessive council tax increases
- allowing councils more discretion over business rate relief
- providing new powers to help save local facilities and services threatened with closure, and giving voluntary and community groups the right to challenge local authorities over their services

Provisions relating to housing will

- abolish the requirement to have a Home Information Pack
- reform the Housing Revenue Account system
- provide for a new form of flexible tenure for social housing tenants
- allow local authorities to discharge their duties to homeless people by using private rented accommodation
- give local authorities the power to limit who can apply for social housing within their areas
- abolish the Tenant Services Authority and provide for a transfer of functions to the Homes and Communities Agency
- amend the way in which a social tenant can make a complaint about their landlord
- improve the ability of social tenants to move to different areas

The planning and regeneration provisions will

- abolish the Regional Spatial Strategies
- abolish the Infrastructure Planning Commission and return to a position where the Secretary of State takes the final decision on major infrastructure proposals of national importance
- amend the Community Infrastructure Levy, which allows councils to charge developers to pay for infrastructure. some of the revenue will be available for the local community
- provide for neighbourhood plans, which would be approved if they received 50% of the votes cast in a referendum
- provide for neighbourhood development orders to allow communities to approve development without requiring planning consent
- give new housing and regeneration powers to the Greater London Authority, while abolishing the London Development Agency

In concluding her talk, Mrs Eggington advised Councillors to keep up to date with the progress of Bills through Parliament by signing up for email alerts or using her Council's RSS feed.

For anyone wishing to learn more about engaging with parliament's scrutiny of legislation, the Houses of Parliament's Outreach Service held regular workshops.