

LURGASHALL PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held in the Village Hall on Thursday, 12 April 2007

Present: Mrs A Martin-Jenkins (Chairman), Mr R T Baker, Mr K M Caird, Mr R E J Cooper, Mr J R Court, Dr A H J Tate, Dr P J H Wilding, Mr J P Wright and Mr PJ Széll (Clerk).

Also present was Dr P Mackey.

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Mr G D J R Sharp and Mr P Moffatt.

MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

The minutes of the last Annual Parish Meeting, held on 11 May 2006, were approved and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

MATTERS ARISING

There were none.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Mrs Martin-Jenkins reported that the Council met for its customary six times during the year. Attendance of Parish Councillors was 83 per cent. but this lower-than-normal figure reflects the fact that there was an unfilled vacancy on the Council until January, when Malcolm Caird was co-opted. Attendance by our County and District representatives was 50 per cent. The Budget and General Purposes Committees each met once and the Risk Assessment Committee twice. The Planning Committee met as and when necessary.

The Council's finances are in excellent order and I will leave the detail for the Clerk's report. However, I would particularly like to mention that the Budget Committee did a very good job last year and many items ended up 'spot on' budget. I hope that we shall be able to say the same for the new financial year.

The last twelve months have been busy. As well as fulfilling its statutory responsibilities, the Council has been faced with an increasing number of consultation documents, many of them about wider issues than those of the Parish. The most important of these consultations has been the District Council's draft Local Development Framework strategy to 2018 which indicates that Lurgashall will not be affected by the national measures for new housing. This is both good and bad and, whilst there are sighs of relief in many quarters, there are some that feel that it is not a good thing for a community to remain too static.

Planning has taken up more of the Council's time than most other issues. The Planning Committee has considered 31 applications. Those of significance have included the ongoing situation at the Woodcraft Park Farm site, where there is a full planning application currently under consideration by the Local Planning Authority, and the two applications relating to development at Kings Copse, both of which have subsequently been withdrawn.

The playground had its statutory annual safety inspection which resulted in several matters requiring attention. These items have all now been dealt with by a specialist firm and the equipment is in good order. During the year, the scruffy fencing on the Greengates side of the site was replaced by metal railings and the Council was delighted to receive a grant from the District Council for 50 per cent. of the cost of this work. A local groundwork contracting firm has been employed for the current year to mow the grass both here and in the unused area in the allotments.

A 50 per cent. take-up of allotments was achieved, although not all the taken-up plots were worked. As in previous years, Ray Baker very kindly undertook the cutting of the unused area in the summer months. Re-fencing work was carried out on the western boundary with the help of a generous grant from West Sussex County Council.

On the highways and footpaths front, some vandals stole or knocked over a number of road signs and footpath way-markers during the summer. These have now largely been replaced. Clearance of brushwood on the bridleway along Bullocks Lane was carried out by volunteers working for the South Downs Joint Committee in readiness for the ditching work but, in the end, this was not done due to the County Council cutting funding. The wettest winter for some years brought flooding problems to roads in the Parish, particularly areas of Jobson's Lane and at Lickfold, where the road was impassable on several occasions. The general condition of the lanes throughout the Parish has been very poor as a result of the continuing wet weather and a particularly large number of contractors' heavy lorries damaging roadsides and banks. Damage by traffic to verges near a couple of sites where building work was being carried out was the subject of complaint from residents.

Again, the wet weather affected the Village Green and parking near the Noah's Ark has caused more damage than normal to the eastern side. Parking has become a year-round difficulty for the village, and particularly since the end of 2006. It is an issue that is being assessed by the Council with cooperation from the pub's tenants. A working party is currently examining possible ways in which the problem might be tackled in the short, medium and long terms and its findings will be discussed by the Council in due course. However, as everyone is well aware, there is not going to be a magic solution.

The Head Forester of Leconfield Estates has recently carried out his six-monthly check on the big chestnut tree on the Green and has reported it to be in good order for its age. However, during his visit, he also examined the chestnut on the little green and told us that it was a victim of a fungal disease and that, therefore, its future may be at risk. This

news has, for the foreseeable future, halted the Council's plans to replace the seat around the tree.

The twice-yearly visit of a waste skip has, again, been of benefit to residents and was well-used. In addition, the District Council, at the Parish Council's invitation, has installed a bottle bank in the Village Hall car park for a trial period; first impressions are that it is a success.

Although not a responsibility of the Parish Council, the future of the football field is causing concern to residents. Due to the Football Club being in abeyance, the condition of the field and surrounding hedges is deteriorating and parishioners are worried about the field's appearance and its future. It would be a very sad day indeed if the Parish lost this important open space and strenuous efforts must be made to retain it for recreational use by the community.

The possible down-grading (or even closure) of St Richard's Hospital is an important issue and the Council sent a letter of support to the Save St Richard's campaign.

It has also supported the National Trust's application to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to fence in an area of Black Down to allow it to be grazed by cattle so that the area can revert to heathland as it was a century ago.

Now some thanks: to Jenny Stephenson for her production of the *Parish Newsletter* and to those who kindly deliver a copy of it every month to each household in the Parish; to Terry Redding who was, until recently, our Litter Warden for some years; and to Paul Read and others who operate the Neighbourhood Watch scheme.

This report marks the end of this Council's term. So, what have we achieved over the last four years? Well, amongst other things, we have:

- negotiated a 35-year extension to the lease on the Village Hall and, through the auspices of the Village Hall Management Committee, refurbished the hall which is considered by all who visit it as a great asset to the community;
- supported the production of the Village Design Statement that was subsequently adopted by the Local Planning Authority as Supplementary Planning Guidance; gone 'on line';
- gained Grade II 'listing' status for the red telephone box on the Village Green;
- replaced an extremely competent Parish Clerk with one who is equally qualified.

None of these things or the numerous regular tasks of the Council could have been achieved without the help and support of you all and for that I can only say a very big 'thank you'.

Some of you are standing for a further term but, sadly, there are three retirements. Jonathan Wright, due to family and work commitments, is standing down but has indicated that he 'might come back one day' – we hope he will; Ray Baker, who has

been an excellent custodian of the Allotments; and last, but not least, Jim Court, who has served the Council very well for some twenty years. We shall miss the fund of local knowledge, experience and practical help that you have all contributed over the years; meetings won't be the same without you.

FINANCE

A summary of the Council's income and expenditure of the year ending 31 March 2007 was distributed to all Council members as well as to the public present. The Clerk explained the main items contained in the summary. The financial year had opened with balances totalling £9,876. During the year, the Council received income of £10,726 (of which £8,000 came from the precept). £11,313 had been spent, leaving available at the end of the year funds totalling £9,289.

PARISHIONERS' QUESTIONS

No questions were raised, but Dr Mackey gave those present some informal observations of recent activity within the District Council with regard to development control and housing.

There being no other business, the Chairman closed the meeting at 7.40 pm.

PJS: 15/04/07