

LURGASHALL PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held in the Village Hall on Thursday, 14 May 2009

Present: Mr R E J Cooper (Chairman), Mr J S Bonnett, Mrs A Martin-Jenkins, Dr A H J Tate, Dr P J H Wilding, Mrs R D Wood and Mr PJ Széll (Clerk).

Also present were Mr C Duncton, Mr J Andrews and four members of the public.

The Chairman opened the meeting at 7.30 pm and welcomed everyone.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Mr K M Caird and Mr G D J R Sharp.

MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

The minutes of the last Annual Parish Meeting, held on 8 May 2008, were approved and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

MATTERS ARISING

There were none.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Mr Cooper reported that the Parish Council had met six times during the past year. The attendance level of Councillors was 78% – some 10% lower than in the preceding two years. The Parish's County Councillor, Chris Duncton, had attended the Council's meetings whenever his busy schedule permitted and had, throughout the year, been a strong advocate for the Parish at County Hall. As in many parishes, participation by members of the public in Council meetings had remained disappointingly low.

In January, Jackie Boxall, had resigned because she felt she could no longer devote sufficient time to the post. The Chairman thanked her for the contribution she had made during her 18 months on the Council, and especially for acting as supervisor of the playground. In March, Rita Wood was co-opted to fill the vacancy left by Jackie.

One change was made at the start of the year to the structure and functions of the Council's Committees. The experiment of assigning any inter-sessional highways questions to the Planning Committee, which had been introduced in 2007, was dropped and the practice of leaving such matters to the Clerk, acting in consultation with the Chairman, was reinstated.

As in 2007-08, the Recreation Committee met six times. The Planning Committee met 13 times – a welcome relief for its Members after its unusually heavy schedule of meetings the year before. The Finance Committee met just once. Members' attendance at Recreation Committee meetings was 70% and at Planning Committee meetings 73%.

A new Model Publication Scheme, drawn up by the Government's Information Commissioner under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, was – as required by law – adopted by the Council in January. The revised Scheme strengthened the commitment placed on all local authorities to provide information to the public routinely and proactively and had been welcomed by the Parish Council as an aid to enabling it to operate in an open and transparent manner.

The Council's finances remain in good shape. The Clerk would give details when he reported. The Chairman merely noted that, despite having to meet a couple of unanticipated outgoings during the year, the outturn at the end of the financial year was near that forecast by the Finance Committee. The Council had decided its precept for 2009-10 should be £9000.

In September, the Council considered a request presented by the Chairman of the Village Hall Management Committee for financial support towards the cost of replacing the Hall's clay tile roof which was in urgent need of repair. After detailed consideration, the Council agreed that, in the event of the Management Committee finding itself unable to meet the full cost of the repairs from its own reserves and other sources, it would make a grant from its own resources of up to £3,000 towards the shortfall.

Planning matters, as always, consumed a lot of Members' time. 31 applications were notified to the Council. Of these, 18 were eventually permitted or granted by the District Council; 4 others involved possible tree preservation orders, 4 were withdrawn, 2 were refused, 2 concerned agricultural development and so did not require consent, and 1 had yet to be decided. In sharp contrast to 2007-08, very few of the applications were found by the Planning Committee to be contentious, difficult or sensitive. Just two of them raised serious concerns:

- (a) an application to erect a sizeable cattle shed at Orchard Park Farm. (This was eventually permitted by the District Council); and
- (b) an application to extend the farmhouse at the same property in a way that the Committee considered would be detrimental to the Lurgashall Conservation Area. (This application was subsequently withdrawn.)

In addition, the Planning Committee followed up a number of concerns brought to its attention regarding the nature or permissibility of various development activities around the Parish. The main issues in this category were:

- (a) the extensive damage being caused to Hillgrove Lane and its verges by large lorries going to and from the Kings Copse building site,
- (b) the very untidy appearance of the Greenfield site at the corner of the Village Green since the old bungalow was demolished, and
- (c) whether there was a change of use from agricultural paddock to domestic garden when part of the wall and hedge immediately to the west of High Hampstead Farmhouse were removed.

The Parish Council remained seriously concerned about the condition and safety of its highways. Lurgashall's narrow lanes were never designed to take heavy goods vehicles of the size and number that used them every day. Nor could they cope safely with the speeds at which many cars, vans and motor cycles were driven nowadays. A combination of this extreme use and an unusually wet winter had resulted in a record number of potholes throughout the parish and severe damage to many fragile verges and roadside banks. Such damage was not unique to Lurgashall of course but the fact remained that the beauty of, and quality of life in, the parish was starting to suffer because of the constant onslaught by vehicles on its roads and lanes, especially during winter.

On a brighter note, the parish's six black and white road signs were one by one being repaired and repainted. Gary Sharp was to be thanked for the high quality of his work on the signposts which ensured they continued to be attractive – as well as informative - features of the parish.

It had been a quiet year where footpaths and bridleways were concerned. The South Downs Joint Committee (SDJC) carried out further remedial work on Bullock Lane. The new surface was a big improvement but further work was still needed in places. SDJC also created a diversion on the Quell to Roundhurst bridleway which enabled users to avoid an impossibly boggy stretch. When funds permitted, major repairs would be needed on the Quell to Leverton bridlepath.

RoSPA's annual inspection had given the playground good overall ratings and concluded that it was a "well maintained site in good condition." The swings had been repainted in bright, modern colours; the slide would receive similar treatment shortly.

In line with the revival of interest in allotments nationally, the hiring of parish allotments had grown steadily. Currently 20 of the 25 plots available were taken – the highest level for a decade. The Council agreed in January that the cost of a full plot in 2009 should be increased to £15 and for a smaller plot should be £7.50p. This was the first increase for more than ten years and was felt to be justifiable because of successive increases in Leconfield's rental charge, higher water charges and sizeable maintenance costs, such as replacement in December of the old fence along the access path to the allotments. The Chairman expressed his gratitude to Gary Sharp for watching over the allotments from day to day on the Council's behalf.

Damage by vehicles parking and turning on the grass verges around the Village Green, especially along its eastern side, was a problem to which an effective solution had yet to be found. Despite Malcolm Caird's patient efforts to advance matters, for which the Chairman was thankful, there had been little progress. The drainage work carried out at the top of the Green during 2007 had reduced "ponding" at the eastern end. But so far the Council's efforts:

- (a) to get the County Council to install setts and/or paint narrow white lines on either side of the roadway between the Noah's Ark and the pond to encourage tidy parking; and
- (b) to obtain a right of way over the first 50 metres or so of Park Lane to enable a small car park to be opened up behind the pub

had proved fruitless. Further discussion with all concerned, including the brewers Greene King, would be needed in the coming year if there was to any hope of improving the parking situation especially when the weather was at its worst in winter.

Elsewhere on the Green, the Leconfield Estate had planted a new tree (a wild service) in the south-east corner, felled the diseased horse chestnut that stood near the driveway to the Malthouse and, after extensive discussion within the Parish Council and with those living around the Green, planted a replacement (a hornbeam) a few metres to the south. It had also thinned out the large horse chestnut at the top of the Green principally for reasons of safety.

The Council's gardening contractors had again done good work in the village. Of particular note had been the way in which they had kept the playground looking neat and well-mown at all times and the big improvement they had made to the appearance of the village pond after just two annual cleanings. The Council had concluded that the fence around the pond was unsightly and, in certain circumstances, could even be a risk to children. So it was looking at the possibility of a different form of barrier such as a box hedge or bushes.

The twice-yearly hiring of a large waste skip remained popular. On both occasions during the year the container left the car park full. The bottle bank continued to be regularly used by many in the parish and had become a well established feature of village life.

Though not formally one of its responsibilities, the Parish Council had followed developments regarding the football field. Thanks to a lot of hard work by Malcolm Caird considerable progress was made during the year. He and the Chairman had joined the Lurgashall FC's management committee in their personal capacities. The committee's aims were to keep open the possibility of football being re-established at some time in the name of Lurgashall FC, to develop relations with Northchapel FC, to get the football pitch back to playing standard and to maintain the entire field to the standards required by the lease. All these objectives were being met. The grass and hedges were being cut, football was again being played on the pitch and the hedge along the road frontage had been relaid through the good offices of SDJC.

During the course of the year three issues of major importance to the parish and on which the Parish Council had been consulted at various stages, were decided, each in a way that was good from Lurgashall's point of view:

- first, when the Government announced the creation of a South Downs National Park in April, it stated that it would include the Western Weald. This meant that with effect from 2011, the entire Parish would lie within the new National Park. Precisely what impact the new designation would have on day-to-day life in Lurgashall remained to be seen;
- secondly, the future of St Richard's as a major general hospital had been assured albeit through the device of amalgamating it with Worthing Hospital in a new Western Sussex Hospitals NHS Trust; and equally significant for Lurgashall, given its location, the Royal Surrey County Hospital would continue to be a major general hospital; and
- thirdly, the campaign to keep Northchapel Primary School as an all-through school for children from 4-11 years was successful sparing the Parish's young children from having to travel daily to Petworth from the start of their education. Many thanks were due to the staff and governors of the school, including Anthea Martin-Jenkins, and also to Chris Duncton, for their long and skilful campaign to save the school.

Various other matters engaged the Council's attention over the year. Among them were:

- the change, for financial reasons, of the DORIS bus system from a door-to-door "pick up and stop" service to a fixed route service; and
- BT's sudden proposal to remove the K6 payphone from Gospel Green as part of a national programme to get rid of uneconomic kiosks and its subsequent invitation to local authorities to adopt or sponsor non-viable kiosks (ie to buy them outright or pay over £500 per year towards their running costs) if they wanted to retain them for heritage or other purposes. Within the past fortnight, however, there has been a further unexpected, but encouraging, twist: BT had announced that the Gospel Green kiosk was to be converted into a cashless payphone.

In closing, the Chairman added a number of thanks to those he had already mentioned:

- to all Members of the Council, for their help and support throughout the year;

- to Malcolm Caird who, as chairman of the Recreation Committee, had given a lot of time and effort to the wide range of matters that fell within that Committee's remit;
- to Peter Wilding who had continued to lead the Planning Committee with great patience and a deep understanding of the planning system;
- to Anthea Martin-Jenkins whose knowledge and long experience of everything to do with the parish and Council had continued to be an important source of help to him as chairman. He was most grateful to her for shouldering the burden of chairing the Finance Committee;
- to Andy Tate, the vice-chairman, who in addition to being very active in the Planning, Recreation and Finance Committees, had done tremendous work throughout the year in running the Parish's excellent website and in carrying out the painstaking, and sometimes tedious, task of regularly scrutinising the Council's books to ensure they were accurate and complete; and finally
- to the Clerk, Patrick Széll, who had made the Chairman's job so much easier to handle.

FINANCE

A summary of the Council's income and expenditure for the year ending 31 March 2009 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 £9,318. During the year, the Council received income of £8,964 (of which £8,200 came from the precept). £9,367 had been spent, leaving available at the end of the year funds totalling £8,915.

PARISHIONERS' QUESTIONS

Three points were raised. *First*, the view of the County Council Highways Department was requested on the increasing use by parish residents of roadside posts and stones to protect their frontages. The questioner said there used to be an understanding that such obstacles must be at least one yard away from the tarmac. In reply, Mr Duncton said he understood there was no County Council rule on the matter but that, in the event of an accident, the person who placed the obstacle might bear some liability.

Secondly, concern was expressed about the recent placing of boulders on the edge of the tarmac beside the Noah's Ark. Whilst welcome in that this was allowing the verge to recover, it had the downside that it was encouraging car drivers to park on verges further around the Green. The Chairman said there had already been discussions with the Highways Department, publican and brewery about controlling parking in the vicinity of the pub but further discussion was needed.

Thirdly, it was noted that the stay on the door of the Village Green telephone kiosk was broken or had been removed. The Clerk would take this up with BT as necessary.

There being no other business, the Chairman closed the meeting at 8.05 pm.

Signed
Chairman of the Parish Council

Date

PJS: 18/05/09