

LURGASHALL PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held in the Village Hall on Thursday, 8 May 2008

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

Also present were Dr P Mackey and three 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 N P Jowett and Mr C Dunton.

MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

The minutes of the last Annual Parish Meeting, held on 12 April 2007, were approved and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

MATTERS ARISING

There were none.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Mr Cooper reported that at the Parish Council elections in May 2007 there had been just six candidates for the nine seats available – Malcolm Caird, Anthea Martin-Jenkins, Gary Sharp, Andy Tate, Peter Wilding and him. All six were duly elected and, at a special meeting of the Council late in May, they had co-opted Jackie Boxall, Neil Jowett and Mike Oakland – all of them new to the Council – to fill the three vacancies. Sadly Mike Oakland resigned in January on health grounds. The new Council met seven times during the year. Attendance by Parish Councillors was 84 per cent. while that by the Parish's County and District Council representatives was 100 per cent and 20 per cent respectively.

After many years dedicated service as Chairman of the Council, Anthea Martin-Jenkins ceased to be Chairman in 2007 and, Mr Cooper continued, he had been elected to take her place with Andy Tate being elected Vice-Chairman. It had been his good fortune, as well as that of the Council and the Parish, that Anthea had continued to be a very active and constructive member of the Council and to give everyone the benefit of her great experience of local government and her fund of knowledge on parish matters.

At the outset of the year, the terms of reference and the membership of the Council's Committees were revised. The General Purposes Committee and the Budget Committee were retained, with the latter being re-named the Finance Committee. The Planning Committee's traditional function of considering all planning applications on behalf of the Council was expanded to cover highways matters (though, in practice, no such matters had come up during the year). A Recreation Committee was created with the task of supervising, and making recommendations to the Council on, the Parish's footpaths, bridleways, village green (including the pond and bus shelter), playground and allotments and also of making recommendations on risk assessment.

The new Recreation Committee, under its chairman, Malcolm Caird, met six times during the year. The Planning Committee, chaired by Peter Wilding, had a particularly heavy twelve months being called on to meet no less than twenty times. The Finance Committee met just once. Attendance by members at Recreation Committee meetings was 72 per cent and at Planning Committee meetings about 75 per cent.

The Government's 2007 revised Code of Conduct for elected and coopted members which, with limited exceptions, had to be adopted as it stood by all local councils, was adopted by the Council in May 2007.

In November, he had circulated a letter to every household in the Parish under cover of the *Newsletter* summarising the Council's work and emphasising Councillors' readiness to hear parishioners views and concerns and bring them before the Council. The Council's policy of openness had been enhanced not only by regularly pinning the Council minutes on the Village Green notice board and summarising them in the *Newsletter* but also by placing the minutes and various Council notices on the Parish website. Andy Tate deserved a big thank-you for all the work he had put – and continued to put – into keeping the Parish website informative, interesting, attractive and up-to-date.

The Council's finances were in good shape. The accounts for 2006-07 received a clean bill of health from both the internal and external auditors and, as Chairman, he was optimistic that the accounts for the year just ended would win similar approval. He would leave the detail of the finances for the Clerk's report under the next agenda item. This said, he would like to say a particular thank you to the Finance Committee for the excellent job it again did in the last financial year, with many items ending up on or very near budget, and also to Andy Tate who once more undertook the detailed task of checking the Council books at four-monthly intervals to help ensure that what they said was accurate and complete.

The last twelve months had been busy. As well as fulfilling its statutory responsibilities, the Council had been faced with an increasing number of consultation documents. The most important of these had been the calls to support the campaigns to save St Richard's Hospital, to keep the Western Weald within the proposed South Downs National Park, to retain the village Post Office and to keep Northchapel Primary School as an all-through school for children aged 4-11. The Council strongly backed all four of these campaigns. It was already known that Lurgashall's post office would survive; the outcomes of the other campaigns were awaited.

Planning had taken up much more of the Council's time than usual. Since the 2007 Annual Parish Meeting, the Planning Committee has considered 52 applications with more of them being contentious, difficult and/or sensitive than in previous years. Among the most significant cases considered were:

- (a) the Woodcraft Folk's most recent application concerning its Park Farm site (on which, after nearly twenty years of discussion, permission for camping was granted subject to a number of strict conditions);
- (b) King's Copse (on which the applicant was successful on appeal to the Secretary of State);
- (c) Greenfield Bungalow (where the applicant's revised proposals for a replacement house and a garage awaited decision by the District Council); and
- (d) High Hampstead Farm and the barns opposite it (both of which had, like Greenfield Bungalow and King's Copse, been the subject of more than one application).

On highways, the major concerns had yet again been:

- the large number of potholes on lanes throughout the parish,
- fly tipping and litter thrown from car windows,

- speeding vehicles, particularly on Jobsons Lane; and
- damage by heavy goods vehicles to the verges and banks along Jobsons Lane.

During the year, the Council have been fortunate to have the active interest and support of Chris Duncton, its new County Councillor, on all these highways problems. The fact that, even with his strong backing, progress had been rather limited underlined how difficult it was – and would continue to be - to achieve satisfactory progress on such matters.

The playground had its statutory annual safety inspection and additionally a five-yearly risk assessment evaluation. The RoSPA inspector had commented favourably on the improved maintenance and condition of the playground since his last inspection. The various repairs carried out in 2006-07 were reflected in the good overall ratings he had given the site and its equipment. A local groundwork contracting firm employed to mow the site throughout the year had done an excellent job. Jackie Boxall was to be thanked for checking the playground's safety and tidiness on a weekly basis.

The take-up of allotments continued to be around 50 per cent, although once again not all the taken-up plots were worked. The Chairman was grateful to Gary Sharp for watching over the allotments on a day-to-day basis on behalf of the Council and for taking on the task of cutting back the heavily overgrown hedge between the allotments and the football field.

It had been a fairly quiet year where footpaths and bridleways were concerned. Work started on the major task of clearing and repairing Bullocks Lane and “No Motorised Vehicle” signs, paid for by the Council, had been erected at both ends of High Lane.

Damage from cars parking on the grass verges around the Village Green, particularly in the vicinity of the Noah's Ark, had continued to be a problem especially during the winter months. There were a number of meetings with County Highways Department officials but they had not been able to offer much in the way of help. The Parish Council had cleared ditches at both ends of the green to allow surface water to flow away from the area more quickly and easily but much remained to be done. The Council would continue to give priority to finding the best way of balancing the increased demand for parking in the vicinity of the pub and the church and the need to ensure that the appearance of the Green was not spoilt.

After much discussion with Neil Humphris, Head Forester at the Leconfield Estate, about the condition of the main trees around the Green, agreement had been reached on:

- (a) replacing the circular bench around the diseased horse chestnut tree on the triangle,
- (b) removing the seriously diseased horse chestnut from outside the Malt House (subject to the District Council consent) and replacing it with a different species once drainage of the surrounding land had improved; and
- (c) planting a new tree (a wild service) in the south-east corner of the Green.

The twice-yearly visit of a waste skip had again been popular with residents and was heavily-used, whilst the bottle bank installed by the District Council in the Village Hall car park on a trial basis had been a success. Whilst parishioners had made regular use of the three glass containers, no complaints about noise or the bank's appearance had been received. The Council had agreed in January that the bank should remain and continue to function on the existing basis. On the other hand, it decided not to take up a District Council invitation to add a textile recycling bank to the car park.

Although the football field was not a Parish Council responsibility, the Council was pleased and relieved to learn that, after many months of uncertainty, the future of the field as a village asset now looked more assured. Thanks to sustained efforts by Malcolm Caird in particular,

the football club committee had been revived, grants had been obtained from the Village Fete towards the cost of the field's rental, mowing and repair of its hedges and steps had been taken to augment income for the club by hiring out the pitch from time to time to football teams from other parishes.

Among other matters of concern to the Council over the year were:

- the damage done to the door and interior of the telephone kiosk on the Village Green which had taken BT a long time to repair; and
- the loss of the Victorian post box outside Parkhurst when the wall in which it was located was demolished in a car crash. The Council greatly regretted the Post Office's determination not to reinstate the box which had been a feature of Jobson's Lane for well over a century and which, unlike the Village Green telephone kiosk, had missed out on Grade II listed status three years ago.

In concluding, Mr Cooper said there were one or two special thank yous he wanted to make. First, to the Chairmen of the two Committees - to Malcolm Caird for all the work he had put in with regard to the Green, allotments and parking issues and to Peter Wilding who had done a marvellous job as Planning Committee chairman in what had been a particularly difficult year. Secondly, his task as Chairman of the Council had been made much easier thanks to the excellent work of the Clerk. He greatly appreciated all his hard work.

FINANCE

A summary of the Council's income and expenditure for the year ending 31 March 2008 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 £9,289. During the year, the Council received income of £8,857 (of which £8,200 came from the precept). £8,828 had been spent, leaving available at the end of the year funds totalling £9,318.

PARISHIONERS' QUESTIONS

A question was raised about the bad condition of the restricted byway at the top of The Quell. It had become so badly churned up by 4x4 vehicles and motorcyclists that it was no longer possible for those for whom it was intended, ie walkers, riders and carriage drivers, to use it. What action was being taken to repair it and to prevent motorised vehicles using it? In reply, the Chairman said that the South Downs Joint Committee, which was responsible for the track, was aware of its very poor state but it had given priority in recent years to repairing High Lane (another restricted byway) and Bullocks Lane because they were more often used. Repairs to such tracks were expensive and SDJC's resources were limited, so remedial action in the immediate future was unlikely. Once repairs had been carried out, however, it might be possible to arrange with SDJC to install bollards and/or "No Motorised Vehicles" signs similar to those in High Lane. The Chairman said that the Council would speak to SDJC again about the track's condition.

MILLENNIUM MAP

In closing the meeting, the Chairman presented a framed and mounted copy of the Parish's Millennium Map to Mrs Martin-Jenkins bearing an inscription commemorating her long service as Chairman of the Parish Council from 1995 to 2007. Mrs Martin-Jenkins agreed to the map being hung permanently on the wall of the Village Hall.

There being no other business, the Chairman closed the meeting at 7.55 pm.

Signed
Chairman of the Parish Council

Date

PJS:
10/05/08