LURGASHALL PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of the Parish Council held in the Village Hall on Thursday, 10 September 2009

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

Also present: Mr C Duncton, Mr J Andrews and two members of the public.

The Chairman declared the meeting open at 7.35 pm.

62/09 - APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE
None.

63/09 – CODE OF CONDUCT
The Chairman reminded members of their responsibilities under the Code of Conduct. The following Members declared a prejudicial interest in the subject matter of agenda item 68/09, para. 2 (village hall re-roofing): Mr Bonnett, Mr Caird, Mrs Martin-Jenkins and Mrs Wood.

64/09 – MINUTES OF LAST MEETING
The minutes of the last meeting were approved and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

65/09 – MATTERS ARISING
No matters were raised.

66/09 – OPEN FORUM
A member of the public asked if the Council was going to submit comments on the Chichester District Council (CDC) proposal to introduce car parking charges in Midhurst and Petworth. The Chairman replied that the Council was encouraging parishioners to respond individually to CDC's questionnaire on the issue and was advertising the protest meeting in Petworth on 15 September (see minute 73/09, below), but would not be commenting as a Council. The same member of the public also registered his support for the idea of covering unworked allotment plots with a plastic membrane (see minute 71/09, para. 3(c), below).

67/09 – COUNCILLORS' REPORTS
- Mr Andrews's report appears at Annex A.
- Among the matters covered by Mr Duncton in his report were the following: (i) the County's waste disposal site at Ford was now fully operational; (ii) the conditions of the County's roads was, he felt, quite good given the considerable financial restraints WSCC were operating under; (iii) the provision of grit boxes to combat icy roads in winter was no longer a service provided by WSCC; (iv) enforcement of street parking regulations would in future be carried out by the local authority, not the Police – a change he regretted; and (v) WSCC had opened a regional office in Horsham to relieve some of the burden on Members for northern constituencies continually having to drive to Chichester.

68/09 – FINANCE
1. Current financial statement. The Clerk distributed:
   (a) a statement of the position of the Council's bank accounts, incorporating details of cheques that needed to be issued and for which approval was sought; and
   (b) figures setting out the Council's income and expenditure against its budget for the current financial year.

The Council approved payment of all the cheques listed in Annex B, below, and agreed to transfer £3,000 from its Reserve Account (ie its contingencies fund) to its Current Account.

2. Village Hall – re-roofing. Further to the Council's decision on 11 September 2008 to contribute towards the cost of the village hall re-roofing project subject to presentation of documentation regarding the project's cost and the finance available to the Village Hall Management Committee (VHMC) (see minute 65/08), the Council considered a letter from Mr Bonnett, the VHMC Chairman, dated 14 August 2009 (see Annex C) and a financial statement prepared by the VHMC Treasurer (see Annex D).

- In introducing his request, Mr Bonnett said that, notwithstanding that the VHMC had successfully raised sufficient money to cover the direct cost of the project, it was not unreasonable that the Council should contribute to the fund given that it had "legal, moral and social responsibility for the Hall" and that external and internal redecoration of the Hall was now needed, in part as a consequence of the re-roofing.
- Mr Jowett and Dr Wilding, whilst congratulating the VHMC for the great job it had done in raising a substantial sum for the re-roofing, were concerned that granting the full £3,000 requested by Mr Bonnett would leave the Council's reserves low, especially when compared with those that the VHMC would have. They proposed that the Council should agree to grant £1,500 right away and postpone a decision on whether the balance of £1,500 was needed after all the works had been completed. Dr Tate said he was persuaded by the argument that the Council was ultimately responsible for the Hall and, together with Mr Sharp, proposed that £3,000 should be granted right away.
- Each proposition was put to a vote of the voting Members and resulted in a tie 2-2 at which point the Chairman exercised his casting vote in favour Dr Tate's proposal to grant £3,000 to the VHMC right away on the ground that, whilst payment in full for the re-roofing project was viable without money from the Council, the Council had a moral obligation to contribute towards the expense involved.

3. Annual return. The Clerk reported that Mazars, the external auditors, had certified the Council's accounts for the year to 31 March 2009 and that, as required, the statutory notices regarding the audited accounts had been displayed on the Village Green notice board.

69/09 - PLANNING

1. Applications. Dr Wilding reported that five planning applications had been notified to the Council since the last meeting, ie the applications concerning The Green, Orchard Park Farm and Greengate Farm House referred to in paragraph 2, below, and the two listed in this paragraph. The application concerning Lower Roundhurst Farm had not yet been considered by the Planning Committee. The Committee had had major comments and objections on two of these applications, namely those relating to Orchard Park Farm and Windfallwood Cottage; copies of the letters it had sent to the District Council, dated 23 and 31 July 2009 respectively, were circulated to those present at the meeting for information.

LG/09/02673/DOM:Windfallwood Cottage, Windfallwood Common

Replacement shed. Lean-to tool shed/log store attached to carport

LG/09/02896/COU: Lower Roundhurst Farm, Tennyson's Lane

Change of use from farm shop and cafe for the sale of an increased range of goods with increased range of goods and extended opening

2. Decisions. Seven decisions had been received from the District Council since the Council's last meeting:

LG/09/01822/PLD: Upper Barn House, Park Farm

Installing a window in the main bedroom of the cottage REFUSE

LG/09/02097/FUL: Valewood House, Bell Vale Lane
Erection of double garage PERMIT

LG/09/02779/TCA: The Green, Lurgashall Green
Notification of intention to reduce crown by 15% 1 no yew tree
DECISION NOT TO PREPARE A TREE PRESERVATION ORDER

LG/09/02740/TCA: Greengate Farm House
Notification of intention to crown lift (to clear house roof and log store) and crown thin by 20% 1 no. Hornbeam tree (marked on plan as T1)
DECISION NOT TO PREPARE A TREE PRESERVATION ORDER

LG/09/02505/DOM: Orchard Park Farm
Demolition of existing utility room and pantry. Construction of new kitchen/breakfast room, boot room, wc, utility room, tack room and glazed link PERMIT

LG/09/02422/LBC: Plash Barn Farm, off Jobson's Lane
Single storey extension PERMIT

LG/09/02430/DOM: Plash Barn Farm, off Jobson's Lane
Single storey extension PERMIT

3. Other planning matters
Woodcraft Park Farm. One Member reported that a soft-sided swimming pool had been erected and used by the Woodcraft Folk in a field opposite their Park farm buildings and questioned whether this was allowed by the organisation's planning consent granted on 17 October 2007. The Clerk was asked to check the position with CDC's Planning Department.

70/09 - HIGHWAYS
Signposts and road markings. The Clerk reported that he had written to Tracey Wood (WSCC Highways Department) on 18 August pointing out (a) that, despite the passage of nearly a year, the black and white sign post at Gospel Green had still not been repaired and re-installed by WSCC's contractors and (b) that her assurance that the central white erroneously painted along Jobson's Lane had still not been removed. There had been no reply, or even acknowledgement, from the Highways Department yet despite Mr Duncton taking the issues up on the Council's behalf and the Clerk sending a reminder e-mail on 8 September.

71/09 - RECREATION
Mr Caird presented the report of the Recreation Committee meeting held on 12 August 2009. Members added information and comments. The Council took note of the report as updated and endorsed various decisions arising from it, as indicated in the following summary:

1. Footpaths and bridleways.
(a) Byway off The Quell. SDJC had repaired damage caused by off-road vehicles to the byway off The Quell so as to make it useable by walkers. One Member said, however, that the work had been so poorly done that the byway was now a serious hazard to horses and riders. The Clerk too had been informed of the new hazard and understood that a complaint had been made directly to SDJC. The Chairman summed up that the Clerk should contact SDJC and press for the concern to be looked into by them.
(b) Public Footpath 2025. WSCC had sought the Council's views on proposals by the owner of Blackdown Park Farm to divert the footpath adjacent to her property. The Council had replied as it had done to a similar application made in 2004, namely that it considered the request should be turned down as the proposed diversion would disadvantage users of the footpath in terms of loss of convenience, enjoyment and fine views.

2. Playground. RoSPA's 2009 inspection had given the playground good overall ratings and had again concluded it was a "well maintained site in good condition". On the basis of the Recreation Committee's detailed review of the inspector's findings, the Council decided that, whilst certain items identified by the inspector should continue to be monitored over the coming year, no specific remedial action was necessary apart from treatment of any significant rust that those repainting the slide might find.

3. Allotments.

(a) Landlord's consent to various activities. The six issues that the Clerk had checked with Leconfield (see minute 58/09, para. 3) had all received broad approval, subject to ensuring that nothing was done that was unreasonable and to obtaining Leconfield consent on the details in each case.

(b) New hedges. Mr Tony Grace, one of the plot holders, had advised on the likely cost of planting a hedge along the western and southern sides of the allotments and on the type of plants that would best suit the purpose for which such hedging was intended. There were practical problems about the exact position of part of the proposed hedge because of the proximity of certain existing plots. It was felt that this could best be resolved by discussion with the individual plot holders concerned.

- The overall cost of buying hedging plants for the 110m involved would, Mr Grace had said, be about £175. To rabbit proof would cost another £410, but there was some doubt if this would be needed given that the two stretches of boundary already had rabbit proof netting. To provide spirals, which would allow grass waste to be scattered under the hedge, would cost a further £150. (All costs subject to VAT.) Mr Grace had offered to plant the hedges (probably helped by others) at no cost. As for funding, an application was being made to the Village Fete Committee in September by some of the allotment holders for a grant to cover all the cost, so the Parish Council would not be asked to contribute.
- On the Recreation Committee's recommendation, the Parish Council approved the scheme and costings outlined above, subject to the necessary funding being obtained from the Fete Committee and to agreement to the detail being obtained from the Leconfield Estate.

(c) Unworked plots and margins. Maintenance of the site's unworked plots continued to give the Council's contractors serious problems. The ground was so uneven that their equipment could not do an effective job on them. One possibility was to cover each plot with heavy duty plastic membrane. It was costly, but would last some years during which time neither weeds nor grass would grow thus making the plots tidier and easier to work once let. The contractors had, however, pointed out that the effectiveness of such plastic sheeting was limited (eg weeds would grow through any tears) and its cost would be considerable. A more effective option, they had said, might be to hire an all-terrain mower two or three times a year to tackle all the unworked plots and margins. The hiring cost was currently £86.50p (including VAT and delivery to site).

- Having considered both approaches, the Council decided that the all-terrain mower option should be tried once to test how effective it was, and also agreed the cost involved. The Council would consider the matter again after the trial.

(d) Clearing the margins. The contractors had successfully cut back the face of the hedge adjacent to the football field. Access to the top of the hedge would be much easier from the football field and so the Council agreed to ask those responsible for cutting the football field side of the hedge to be responsible for this. As for the thick undergrowth between the twin fences that ran alongside the football-field hedge (one of them a rabbit-proof fence), the contractors had suggested that by far the easiest, quickest – and hence cheapest – way to clear it would be apply a weed killer (cost: around £30). After careful consideration, the Council decided to proceed in this way and agreed the cost involved.

4. Village Green.

Damage from parking. Mr Caird presented a proposal for remedial work to the damaged areas at eastern side of the Green caused by motor vehicles churning up the grass verges. The work, which he hoped could be completed before the onset of winter, would cover:

(a) placing kerb stones along both sides of the access road to the Church from its junction with the road around the green to a point level with the northern edge of the pond;

(b) landscaping around the pond, including replacing the surrounding fence with a suitable hedge; and

(c) tidying the roadside verges from a point level with the northern edge of the pond southwards as far as the corner opposite Jubilee Cottage.

Estimates and indications Mr Caird had received for carrying out this work showed that the work would cost in the region of £6,400. He had reason to believe that WSCC would contribute £2,500 towards (a) and that the Noah's Ark/Greene King would pay about £2,000. If, therefore, the Village Fete Committee were to provide £1,000 and the Parish Council a similar amount, the cost would be fully met.

- This was not, said Mr Caird, the entirety of the repair work that was needed. It should be seen merely as Phase I of a larger project, with the prospect that further work (eg continuing the line of kerb stones along the wall in front of the Churchyard and repairing the verges referred to in (c), above, by lifting the soil, inserting shale and reinstating the soil and grass) would be carried out in coming years.
- The Council approved Mr Caird's proposal; agreed in principal to pay £1,000 towards the cost of Phase I provided that financial commitments as envisaged above had been made by WSCC, Noah's Ark/Greene King and the Fete Committee; and authorised the General Purposes Committee to release up to £1,000 from the Council's reserves at the appropriate time.

72/09 – VILLAGE GREEN PHONE BOX

The Clerk introduced letters recently received from BT and CDC regarding the former's proposal to remove the telephone equipment from the red call box on the Village Green. BT's letter pointed out that the telephone had not been used at all during the past 12 months and invited the Council to adopt (ie purchase) the box, minus the telephone equipment, for a nominal £1. Members stressed the important contribution made the K6 red kiosk to the quintessentially British character of the village conservation area – a fact reflected in the Grade 2 listing the box was given in January 2005. They did not, however, feel there was a case for the Council to adopt the kiosk, let alone to convert it, as suggested, to some other use such as a miniature art gallery or local information booth. The general feeling was that the kiosk ought to continue to be available for its original purpose, as a public service, even if only rarely used.

73/09 - CORRESPONDENCE

Among the communications received by the Council since its last meeting were:

1. South Downs Joint Committee. SDJC had sent the Council its annual letter summarising the work it had carried out generally and within the parish over the past year. The Clerk had completed a questionnaire about the Council's satisfaction with SDJC's services.
2. Waste recycling. CDC had contacted the Council to report that the District had achieved a 40% recycling rate (over 3250 tonnes) for the first time.
3. Car parking charges. CDC had written asking the Council to help publicise its plans to introduce parking charges in Petworth and Midhurst car parks. Petworth Town Council had asked the Council to advertise its meeting on this contentious issue on 15 September.
4. National Park Authority. The Sussex Association of Local Councils had invited the Council to be represented at a meeting in Easebourne Priory to consider, principally, the options for parish council representation on the future South Downs NPA. Dr Tate had attended. A further meeting would take place in Arundel Town Hall on Wednesday, 7 October 2009 at 7.00 pm.
5. Dog Control Orders. CDC had again approached the Council asking if it wished to be covered by the Dog Control Orders it was in the process of preparing. The Clerk had replied that at present the Parish saw no need to be included.

74/09 – ANY OTHER BUSINESS

1. Action on the Green. Mr Bonnett reminded Members that the annual Action on the Village Green event was taking place on Sunday, 27 September. Whilst many of the activities would be led by people from CDC, help from parishioners to set up the equipment at the start of the day and to take it down at the end would be much appreciated.
2. Council meeting times. The Chairman asked Members if they were content with the current starting time for Council meeting or if, given in particular the pressures on those returning from work in London and elsewhere, 8.00 pm would be preferable. Members agreed to stay with a 7.30 pm starting time.

75/09 – DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Parish Council would take place on Thursday, 12 November 2009 commencing at 7.30 pm.

There being no other business, the Chairman closed the meeting at 10.10 pm.

PJS:15/9/09