

## LURGASHALL PARISH COUNCIL

### **Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held in the Village Hall on Thursday, 13 May 2010**

*Present:* Mr R E J Cooper (Chairman), Mr J S Bonnett, 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, Mrs P Hardwick and 15 residents.

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.

#### MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

The minutes of the last Annual Parish Meeting, held on 14 May 2009, were approved and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

#### MATTERS ARISING

There were none.

#### CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Mr Cooper reported that in the past year, the Parish Council had been faced with two particularly difficult issues - damage caused by the parking of vehicles around the Village Green and a proposal to use the village as a film location. Both provoked controversy. He would go into more detail later in his report.

The Council had met the customary six times during the past year. After last year's dip, Members' attendance level was back up to 82%. Despite their heavy schedules, our County and District Councillors missed very few of the Council's meetings. He thanked them for this. In contrast, attendance by the general public was poor to non-existent – save at one meeting when a large group turned out to voice its strong concern about the Village Green parking problem.

The Recreation Committee met five times, the Planning Committee 15 times and the Finance Committee once. Members' attendance at Planning Committee meetings was 83% and at Recreation Committee meetings a disappointing 53%.

As ever, unrepaired potholes, crumbling road verges and flooding caused by blocked culverts created difficulty for users of the parish's lanes and in January the problems became even worse due to the exceptionally heavy snowfalls. The Highways Department was gradually dealing with the potholes, verges and culverts.

The road sign at Gospel Green had at last been repaired and reinstated - the job took the County Council's contractors 18 months - but the Parish Council's long battle to remove the central white line along Jobsons Lane that was erroneously repainted after the road was resurfaced last summer was ultimately unsuccessful.

During the 12 months, 35 planning applications were notified to the Council. Of these, 17 were granted or permitted by the District Council, 5 involved possible Tree Preservation Orders, 4 were withdrawn, 3 were refused and 6 had yet to be decided. In about a dozen cases, the Committee decided to send strong letters of objection or concern to the District Council. A number of the applications highlighted a growing trend towards overdevelopment of sites. It took two forms: demolishing homes so as to replace them with much more substantial houses (as at Greenfield Bungalow and Leigh Barton) and constructing additional residential accommodation at already sizeable properties (as at Orchard Park Farm, Jays Farm and Barfold Farm).

Specific concerns monitored by the Planning Committee during the year included:

- The high visibility of Kings Copse from many corners of the Parish, including the top of Blackdown, and the possibility that some of its external materials were not in accordance with the planning consent;
- The apparently unauthorised change of use of farm buildings at Old Mill Farm and the lack of consent for the new access track leading to them; and
- The constantly unkempt appearance of the Greenfield Bungalow building site at the corner of the Village Green (though hopefully matters there would improve now that construction work was under way).

Staffing problems at the District Council's Planning Enforcement Unit had made resolution of these and other planning issues painfully slow. A number of e-mails and telephone calls to Chichester during the year were simply not acted on. In January, the District Council accepted there was need to improve its performance on planning enforcement generally and it introduced new and faster procedures.

RoSPA's annual inspection again gave the playground good overall ratings and concluded it was "a well maintained site in good condition". Repainting of the slide in colours similar to those used on the swings would, hopefully, be done during 2010.

Last June, he had chaired a meeting to listen to allotment holders' concerns and find out what support they, as a group, would like from the Council. Most of those present made it clear that they liked the existing system of informal self-regulation and were opposed to establishing an Allotment Holders Group with formal rules. There was general support for planting a hedge along the west and south sides of the site to act as a windbreak and this had since been done with the aid of a County Council grant. Tony Grace was to be thanked for planting the new hedge free of charge. The meeting also requested a bench for use by allotments holders and their friends. He hope this modest, but very practical, suggestion would become reality during the current year.

After the previous year's surge of interest in renting Parish allotments, numbers had dropped slightly. Currently, 17 of the 25 plots were being worked. The Council had agreed to maintain fees for the year at £15 for a large plot and £7.50p for a small one.

With the creation of the new National Park, the South Downs Joint Committee, which had cared so well for the Parish's footpaths, bridleways and byways, would cease to exist and its responsibilities revert to the County Council or be delegated to the new National Park Authority. Either way, the Parish's hope – and expectation – must be that the excellent service it had enjoyed from SDJC would continue unabated.

In autumn 2009, under the District Council's affordable housing commitment, Hyde Martlet circulated an outline proposal to redevelop the garage area at the south-eastern end of Greengates to provide 4 additional housing units, plus 6 car parking spaces. At a meeting on site with Hyde Martlet, he had stressed that, whilst the Council was not opposed in principle, their plan was seriously flawed because it would make a part of Greengates that already had serious access and parking problems even more congested. Hyde Martlet saw the point and agreed to rethink their proposal.

BT had continued to send confusing messages about the future of the Parish's two red call boxes. The District and Parish Councils had always opposed its schemes to remove the kiosk at Gospel Green and – for the time being at least – the opposition had been successful because mobile phone reception in the area was poor. As for the Village Green kiosk - which was listed - BT wanted to remove its telephone equipment and get the Parish Council to buy the kiosk for a nominal sum. The Council had consistently argued that the box should continue as a public service, even if only occasionally used, and it had backed the District Council's call for a moratorium on the future of all such boxes till the new National Park Authority had considered the matter.

Throughout the year, the Council and the Recreation Committee had wrestled with the consequences of the ever-growing number of vehicles parking around the Village Green. Clients of the Noah's Ark had undoubtedly been the main cause of the congestion and damage to the verges, but they were not alone; the cars of churchgoers, rambles and cricketers also contributed to the problem. There was no simple one-off solution. The Council had adopted a phased approach towards improving matters. Last November, on the initiative of Malcolm Caird, the County Council had set kerb stones along the access road to the Church and tidied up and reseeded the adjacent verges. The cost of around £6,600 was met by the PCC, Village Fete Committee, the tenants of the Noah's Ark, the County Council and the Parish Council. This opened the way to the next stage of the project – landscaping around the pond, including replacing the surrounding fence with a suitable hedge (part-financed by the County Council) and tidying up the verges between the pond and Jubilee Cottage. The Council was, however, very conscious that long term, permanent solutions still needed to be found. The possibilities included purchasing the football field; making greater use of it for parking; “grasscreteing” part of the area between the pond and Jubilee Cottage; and erecting permanent low-level “no parking” signs and/or corner posts.

In November, a proposal was put to the Council to use Lurgashall as the location for a film. The benefits for the parish would have included “substantial” location fees, publicity for the village and an opportunity for residents to be extras. The disadvantages would have included disruption of village life for 12 weeks (at least), large sets constructed on the Green and road closures. The Council arranged a public meeting in February to hear residents’ views on the proposal. The film’s producer was present to answer questions. Some residents were enthusiastic about the proposal; others were hesitant or strongly opposed. Upon further reflection, the producer felt Lurgashall was not, after all, ideal for his film. He withdrew his proposal and the parish was spared having to make a tough choice.

The twice-yearly visit of a waste skip to the village remained an unqualified success, as was the bottle bank.

The Council’s finances remained in good order. He would leave it to the Clerk to go into the details and merely note that during the year, the Council had made unanticipated one-off payments of £3000 to the Village Hall Management Committee towards retiling the Hall’s roof and £1000 to the County Council towards the overall cost of kerbing at the eastern end of the Village Green. In January, the Council agreed that the gap these outgoings had left in its reserves should be made up over two to three years and, as a first step, decided that its precept for 2010-11 should be £11,000.

Among notable happenings affecting parish life during the year were the following:

- The establishment of a Living History Group which aimed to collect and record details about Lurgashall’s past before they were lost for ever.
- In September 2009, there was another successful Action on the Green day for children. The initiative and planning for the event came from a group of Lurgashall residents, led by Jeremy Bonnett and Sue Lambot.
- Anthea Martin-Jenkins was re-appointed as a Governor of Northchapel Primary School for a further three years. He congratulated her and thanked her for continuing in this important role - looking after the interests of local parents and children.
- In December, Jenny Stephenson had retired from editing the *Parish Newsletter*. She deserved everyone’s thanks for her excellent work over the last seven years. The new editor, Annabel Grout, planned various changes to the *Newsletter*’s format and content. Some had already been introduced. He wished her well.
- On 30 December 2009, Amy Seager of Greengates celebrated her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday – the first Lurgashall resident in living memory to reach that milestone. The Council had marked the occasion with a congratulatory card and flowers.

In closing this review, he would like to say a number of “thank yous”.

- to the Village Hall Management Committee which had continued its excellent work to make the Hall a credit to the Parish. He congratulated the entire team. They richly deserve the gratitude of the parish, as did the PCC for the way in which it kept the Church and churchyard looking so attractive and cared for at all times.

- to Peter Wilding and Anthea Martin-Jenkins who had continued to lead the Council's Planning and Finance Committees with skill, patience and commitment.
- to Andy Tate, the Council's vice-chairman, for his wisdom whenever he had needed a sounding board and for continuing to run the Parish's excellent website.
- to Gary Sharp for the many practical tasks he had carried out – and continued to carry out - around the Parish, ranging from day-to-day oversight of the allotments on the Council's behalf to repairing the parish's road signs and the Village Green notice board.
- to Malcolm Caird for the tremendous amount of good work he had put into solving the problem of parking around the Green. He greatly appreciated the many hours he had dedicated to this difficult matter over the past three years and was disappointed that some members of the community did not view his contribution in a similar way. Members were all going to miss his very active and creative presence on the Council.
- to Patrick Széll who was far more than a Clerk. He appreciated all the help he gave above and beyond his formal remit to him as Chairman and to other Councillors.

Finally, he wanted to say how grateful he was for the unstinting support he had received from all his fellow Councillors, as well as from the County and District Councillors, during what had at times been a difficult 12 months. Thank you.

FINANCE

A summary of the Council's income and expenditure for the year ending 31 March 2010 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 £8,915. During the year, the Council received income of £12,804 (of which £9,000 came from the precept). £15,770 had been spent, leaving available at the end of the year funds totalling £5,949.

PARISHIONERS' QUESTIONS

No substantive matters were raised.

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

*Signed* .....  
Chairman of the Parish Council

*Date* .....

*PJS: 15/05/10*