LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

Parish of Lurgashall

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held in the Village Hall on Thursday, 14 April 2011

Present from the Parish Council: Mr R E J Cooper (Chairman), Mr J S Bonnett, Mr G J Hayhurst, 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 the Clerk, Mr P J Széll.

Also present: Mr C Duncton and four members of the public.

The Chairman of the Parish Council opened the meeting at 7.35 pm and welcomed everyone.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE
Apologies for absence had been received from Mr N P Jowett and Mrs P A Hardwick.

MINUTES OF LAST MEETING
The minutes of the last Annual Parish Meeting, held on 13 May 2010, were approved and signed by the Chairman of the meeting as a true record.

MATTERS ARISING
There were none.

PARISH COUNCIL CHAIRMAN'S REPORT
Mr Cooper reported that, during the past year, the Parish Council had been faced with two particularly demanding issues. First there was the continuing problem of damage around the Village Green from irresponsibly parked vehicles and, secondly, the more recent concern about how to keep the parish's roads open during severe winter weather. He said he would comment on both matters later in his report.

During the year, the Council had met six times. At the first meeting in May, it decided to replace its Recreation Committee, which had a very wide remit covering the village green, allotments, play area, public rights of way and risk assessment, with a Committee concerned solely with the needs of the Village Green. Responsibility for risk assessment was remitted to the Finance and General Purposes Committee and, as was already the case for highways, day-to-day matters on rights of way, the playground or allotments that required action between Council meetings would be dealt with by the Clerk, guided as necessary by the Chairman. In addition, in the autumn a small Winter Management Committee was set up.

In November, Geoff Hayhurst had been co-opted to the Council to fill the vacancy created by Malcolm Caird's resignation in May and straight away he became heavily involved in the work of the Village Green and Winter Management committees.

Attendance by Councillors at the six meetings had been 88% - the highest level since 2006. Attendance by the Parish's County and District Councillors was around 75% which, given their many duties elsewhere, was commendable and much appreciated by the Council. Participation by members of the public in the Council's meetings ranged from 17 on one occasion to just 2 on another.

The Planning Committee had met 14 times and the Finance and General Purposes Committee once. Meetings of the Village Green and Winter Management committees were convened as and when necessary. Members' attendance at Planning Committee meetings was lower than in 2009-10 at 77%.

During the year, the Planning Committee considered 35 applications, making a total of 151 during the four-year cycle of the Council – roughly the same as in both the preceding four-year cycles. In 10 cases, the Committee had written to the District Council objecting to, or voicing serious concern about, the development proposed. Among the significant cases it had considered were:

(a) Land west of Dickhurst House (where the applicant proposed – unsuccessfully - to erect a dwelling of very modern design partly in the formal garden of a listed building);

(b) Barfold Farm (whose owner sought permission to construct an estate office, storage barn and 16 looseboxes, to repair and alter the dimensions of a polo pony exercise track and to change the use class of his property);

(c) Greengates (in which HydeMartlet sought consent to build three new dwellings in the existing and, it claimed, under-used garage compound area; the application had eventually been withdrawn); and

(d) Woodcraft Park Farm (where the Woodcraft Folk successfully sought to have their temporary permission to hold camps for a maximum of 100 persons for up to 60 days a year made permanent).

In addition, the Committee had made successful requests for Tree Preservation Orders to be placed on an important yew tree in St Laurence's churchyard and on a potentially vulnerable oak on the boundary of Greenfield Bungalow (now named Boundary Cottage). Its concern about the fate of some oaks to the south of the Greengates garage compound had been taken up by the District Council.

The Committee had recently learned that the Secretary of State had agreed its request to give listed building status to 1 Quell Cottages (a 17th century dwelling).

The Committee had noticed two very positive trends within the District Council over the past year. First, a number of planning decisions had cited the need to protect the character, appearance and landscape of the new National Park as a reason for refusing

applications (eg at Old Mill Farm, Jays Farm and Victory Cottage). Secondly, it had been readier than before to start enforcement action when a probable planning breach was detected (eg at Boundary Cottage, High Hampstead Farm and, again, Old Mill Farm).

The deteriorating condition of the verges around the Village Green caused by thoughtless car parking continued to anger parishioners and it remained the Council's main headache. In November, Phase 2 of the Council's repair programme had been carried out. Aided by generous contributions from the Village Fete Committee and the tenants of the Noah's Ark (to both of whom he was very grateful), the verge from the pond to the corner opposite Jubilee Cottage had been repaired and kerbing had been installed to keep the verge distinct from the highway. The cost was £4000. The County Council's contractors did the work but, unfortunately, this time the County had been unable to help towards the cost. Greene King, the brewers, remained unwilling to contribute even though it was the Noah's Ark's clients who were the principal cause of the grass verges being ruined every winter. Despite the increasing difficulty of raising the necessary money, the Council planned next to carry out Phase 3 of the programme – repair of damage to the triangle.

As noted in the previous year's report, such repairs were merely stop-gap measures. The Council was conscious that Lurgashall's parking problem would not cease until permanent solutions had been found. The most effective solution would be an additional car park near the Green. But land for such a purpose was hard to find and it could be very costly. There were no easy answers to the problem. It had many aspects. To reconcile them all, time, money and patience were required. In taking the matter forward, the Council would continue to give priority to finding the best way of balancing the increased demand for parking near the pub and church with the need to ensure that the appearance of the Green and its surrounds were not spoilt.

Turning to highways, the main concerns during the year had been:
- damage by heavy trucks and vans to the verges and banks along Jobson's Lane and to the frontage of The Chimes;
- flooding after heavy rain on Jobson's Lane (around Jack Fisher's Brook and by Little Brockhurst) and on Northhurst Lane (where it entered the village);
- speeding vehicles, particularly along the southern side of the village green and on Jobson's Lane; and
- damage by builders' lorries and cars to the verges by Greenfield Bungalow during the lengthy construction works there.

On a more positive note, there had been fewer potholes on the parish and so fewer complaints. As ever, the Parish Council had been fortunate to have the active interest and support of Chris Duncton, its County Councillor, on this and other highways matters.

The brief spurt of interest in renting allotments from the Council had continued to fall away. In the current year, just 17 of the 25 plots had been leased, five less than two years before and well short of the position in the 1990s when all the plots were worked. The Council had decided to keep plot fees the same as in 2009-10.

The playground had its statutory annual safety inspection in June. For the third year running, RoSPA's report had given it good overall ratings and concluded that it was "a well maintained site in good condition". In considering the report, the Council had noted that no major action was needed but it agreed on some minor repairs and maintenance.

2010-11 had been the last year in which the Parish's public rights of way were overseen by the South Downs Joint Committee. On 1 April responsibility for them had reverted to the County Council. As Chairman, he had written on the Council's behalf to Bruce Middleton thanking him for the excellent service he and his team had given Lurgashall over many years and wishing them well at the new National Park Authority. He had also stressed how much the Council appreciated the commitment of Mike Oakland over many years to protecting the Parish's many rights of way. Among the works carried out by SDJC within the parish over the final 12 months had been repairs of the footbridge on the path leading from the churchyard towards The Chimes and repair of the surface of the byway leading from The Quell to Leverton, plus the erection of "No motorised vehicles" signs at both ends of it.

The severe winter weather in 2009-10 had led the County Council to call on parishes, and especially those in rural areas, to draw up so-called Winter Weather Management Plans. Lurgashall's Plan, like those of other parishes, had involved:

= requesting bulk "hippo" bags of salt;
= identifying locations within the parish at which to site them;
= finding volunteers to sprinkle the salt on roads and footpaths when the temperature justified it; and also
= signing off the expenses claims of contractors hired and paid for by the County Council to clear snow from specified roads with snow ploughs.

Inevitably, given that this had been the Plan's first year of operation, things had not always run smoothly. Everyone involved was on a learning curve. The first major fall of snow came before the County Council had managed to get the promised bags of salt to the parish. Even when delivered, it had soon become apparent that the bags were not always at the right spot and that in future the parish would need more of them and at more locations. Also, since the County Council's delivery of hippo bags was haphazard whilst it automatically refilled salt bins in early autumn, there was a strong case for the Parish Council purchasing some salt bins.

This said, the Winter Management Plan had succeeded in keeping Lurgashall more accessible than had been the case the previous harsh winter. Thanks to the sterling efforts of a few local volunteers after the second snowfall, large stretches of the parish's roads had been kept passable; David Nixon, in particular, deserved parishioners' gratitude. But the Council recognised there was no room for complacency. It (and, he added, the County Highways Department) must learn from experience. To this end he had invited the relevant County official to participate in a review meeting with neighbouring parishes in Lurgashall in May.

Regarding waste disposal, the twice-yearly waste skip had continued to be popular with residents. It had been heavily used on each occasion. Almost as successful was been the

bottle bank that had been installed at the Village Hall car park in January 2007. The three containers would, however, shortly be removed as the District Council now allowed households to put waste glass into their maroon recycling bins. There was a new covered litter bin on the Village Green replacing the old one which had rusted badly.

The Council's finances were in good order. Its 2009-10 accounts had received a clean bill of health from the auditors. He would make just one general point and leave it to the Clerk to go into more detail. In recent years, the Council had made sizeable contributions towards repair of the Village Hall's roof and the verges around the Village Green. As a result its reserves had been significantly reduced. In the previous year's report, he had reported that the Council was satisfied that "the gap these outgoings had left in its reserves should be made up over two to three years" by increasing the precept. Despite the national economic downturn and the belt tightening it had necessitated, the Council remained of the view that it was in the interests of the parish and its residents to keep to this approach for the current year.

In closing, there were some thank yous he wished to record. First, many thanks to the Chairmen of the Council's various Committees – to Anthea Martin-Jenkins, Peter Wilding, Andy Tate and, most recently, Geoff Hayhurst. The time, energy and skill each had put into making sure the Council's business was thought through and well presented had made his task as Chairman of the Council much easier. Secondly, many thanks to Gary Sharp for all the excellent practical work he did around the village for everyone's benefit. True to his character, what he did was always been carried out with no fanfare and much skill. Thirdly, many thanks to the Clerk who had kept him on the straight and narrow through both the good times and the not so good.

Finally, he wished to say again how grateful he had been for the support he had received from his fellow Councillors, as well as from the Parish's County and District Councillors, during not just the preceding 12 months, but over the past four eventful years.

PARISH COUNCIL'S FINANCES

A summary of the Parish Council's income and expenditure for the year ending 31 March 2011 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 £5,949. During the year, the Council received income of £14,795 (of which £11,000 came from the precept). £13,932 had been spent, leaving available at the end of the year funds totalling £6,812.

PARISHIONERS' QUESTIONS

One parishioner enquired about progress in finding land for a car park to relieve pressure on the Village Green and called for measures to control vehicles speeding through the village. On the first point, he asked if there had been any positive replies and suggested that, as the problem of vehicles parking on and damaging the verges around the Green generally involved only about ten cars, the owner of Orchard Park Farm could be approached to sell or lease a little of his land to the Noah's Ark for storing the material

currently occupying the garden space immediately behind the pub's stables so that that space could be used of parking about ten cars?

On the second point, he favoured the introduction of 30 mph signs around the village and/or the use of rumble strips. There were already many signs around the Green. A few more would make little difference whilst having the beneficial effect of curtailing the speed of most drivers, as would the presence of rumble strips.

In reply to the first point, the Chairman said the Leconfield Estates and the owner of Park House had both declined to sell or lease any land for car parking. As for the football field, the Diocese continued to stress that the lease was simply for the playing of football. The Parish Council would continue its search but, he stressed, the options were limited as a new car park beyond a certain distance from the Church and pub would simply not be used. On the second point (speeding), the Chairman recalled that the Parish Council had discussed both suggestions at some length at its last meeting. He emphasised that speed limits were only as effective as their enforcement to which Mr Duncton added that the Police would not come regularly to Lurgashall or other rural parishes, to check on speeding. Besides, when parishes had carried out speed gun checks on vehicles using their roads, it was regularly found that speeds were not as high as individuals concerned imagined. On rumble strips, Mr Duncton said that the evidence was that they caused a lot more disturbance than they actually solved whilst the residents of rural areas – and in particular villages – do not like proliferation of road signs.

In answer to a question from another parishioner, the Clerk said that the Parish Council's regular outgoings on the allotments had three purposes: annual land rental, water charges and occasional trimming by contractors of hedges and the grass on unworked plots.

Mrs Martin-Jenkins proposed a vote of thanks to the Chairman of the Parish Council for all his hard work for the Council over the past year. Mr Duncton thanked him specifically for instigating the occasional meetings of Parish Councils north of Midhurst and Petworth to review the operation of their Winter Management Plans.

There being no other business, the Chairman closed the meeting at 8.10 pm.

Signed ……..
Chairman of the Annual Parish Meeting

Date ……

PJS: 18/04/11