

MINUTES OF THE LURGASHALL ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD IN THE VILLAGE HALL ON THURSDAY 9TH MAY 2024

From the Parish Council: Mrs Brett Burkhart (also in attendance as District Councillor), Mrs A Martin-Jenkins, Mr N Jowett, Mr Adrian Stainton, Dr A Tate and Mr P Wilding

Also present: County Councillor Janet Duncton and eight members of the Public

The Chair of the Parish Council opened the meeting at 8pm and welcomed everyone to Lurgashall's Annual Parish Meeting 2024.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Parish Councillor Jane Landstrom

Parish Councillor Andrew Loughan

District Councillor Mrs Ellie Newbery

Jim Rice – Village Shop Chair

Neil Harding – Village Fete Chair

2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes from the last Annual Parish Meeting held on Wednesday 17th May 2023 were approved and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

3. MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

4. PARISH COUNCIL CHAIR'S REPORT – Anthea Martin-Jenkins

It's very good to see you at our Annual Parish Meeting and a warm welcome to you all. We're looking forward to hearing about what the Village Organisations have been doing over the last year later but, first, I shall give you our Parish Council annual summary.

It's been quite a quiet twelve months with nothing exceptional happening. We co-opted Peter Wilding back on the Council in September and are delighted that he re-joined us. We've had good attendance by Councillors (2024 82%; 2023 81%). There is still one vacancy and we would dearly like to fill it so, if there is anyone who's willing to spare a few hours during the year to join us, you'd be more than welcome.

Planning

The Planning Committee has considered 24 applications this year, compared with 22 in the previous one. As always, it's sometimes not easy to find 'planning reasons' to object to applications that we don't like and, if we do, it doesn't make us too popular, but we do our best to strike a reasonable balance to try to protect our beautiful Parish as well as moving with the times.

Highways

As you will remember, we had serious issues with the state of Jobson's Lane, which dragged on for years, but WSCC finally carried out some substantial repairs and patching last summer and the road surface is much improved. However, there are other lanes in the Parish that are far from satisfactory and we need to start applying pressure to get them rectified.

Some of you have commented adversely about the tree felling at Windfallwood and the Council is also very concerned at the savage way in which it's been done. The exercise carried out wasn't within our remit but, apparently, all the necessary licences were obtained from the Forestry Commission. Sadly, there is no plan for any re-planting. The Council wrote to the owners suggesting this but they are not going to act on our suggestion, which is a great pity.

We carried out two mornings of litter-picking – one in the autumn and one in March – both of which yielded a disgraceful amount of rubbish. Most of the work was carried out by Councillors but we had six worthy volunteers, who helped us in the spring. It would be wonderful if others joined in next time to lessen the burden.

Allotments

The Allotments are fully let and Jane Landstrom is very efficient at keeping the holders in order and ensuring the area is well-maintained, for which we're so grateful.

Playground

The Playground is well-used but some of the ageing equipment needs some tweaking and minor repairs to ensure it remains safe for use. We're grateful to Garden Escapes for mowing and tidying the area and to Andrew Loughan for doing regular checks of the equipment and volunteering to carry out some of the repairs.

Village Green

Our thanks to the Cricket Club for maintaining the Green in such excellent condition over the past year. I think the responsibility for this is now passing to the Lurgashall Recreation Association who, I'm sure, will make certain that the high standard continues.

As you're well aware, the old chestnut tree was felled for safety reasons last year and Leconfield Estate has planted an oak tree to replace it. Unfortunately, not too many of us here this evening will benefit from seeing it reach maturity but it will be enjoyed by future generations!

The old Parish Noticeboard was replaced with a splendid new, custom-built one, which was made by the grandson of one of our Parishioners and is a great improvement as I'm sure you'll agree.

Finance

The Council's finances are in good shape and there is a healthy reserve in case of unforeseen needs. As a result, we haven't increased the annual Precept for the 5th year running. In addition to the usual expenses, we have given grants to the Village Shop, Cricket Club, Lurgashall Recreation Association, Village Hall, Parochial Church Council for help with the Churchyard and Northchapel Primary School.

We have also provided two skips to enable residents to dispose of rubbish and, hopefully, deter fly-tipping. This exercise is always popular and the skips always fill up very quickly. We're proposing to provide a further skip in the autumn.

Finally

My thanks to our County Councillor, Janet Duncton, to our two District Councillors, Brett Burkhart and Ellie Newbery and, although we haven't needed their help too often during the year, they've been very good at attending our meetings. I'd also like to thank the Parish Councillors for their contributions to the good of the Parish and for their support; I hope you feel they do a good job. Last but not least, we're enormously indebted to our Clerk, Helen Cruikshank, for her hard work and for keeping us in order.

5. COUNTY COUNCILLOR'S REPORT

Good news: WSCC Fire Station at Broadbridge Heath which is a high-tech facility used for training with international interest.

Children's Services: WSCC has 6 children's homes which are now rated good or outstanding by OFSTED.

Big problem: Roads. Potholes and banks slipping are a huge problem due to the bad weather. Please continue to report all issues to WSCC. New roads and cycle lane projects have been pushed back and county money is being spent on existing roads which need attention.

Roundhurst Lane in Lurgashall parish is in urgent need of work.

Janet Duncton left the meeting at 8.30pm

6. DISTRICT COUNCILLOR'S REPORT – Brett Burkhart

Last year's May elections voted in a significant majority Liberal Democrat Council administration at Chichester District Council. 5 Conservative Councillors, 4 Selsey Alliance and 2 Green Councillors were also voted in. This has brought about a shift in stance in the way the Council is spending taxpayers' money. Many promises have been made and results are eagerly awaited.

Sewage is still a problem: intermittently being released into Chichester Harbour. Everyone, including local MP, Gillian Keegan, is trying to put pressure on Southern Water to rectify this, which will take time and a great deal of investment.

The Local Plan was inherited by the new administration in May 2023 and it was ready to go. However, the new administration wanted to ponder it further, and in the meantime new measures from Highways have been required. Gillian Keegan stepped in to resolve these measures, but this took time. This means that the Local Plan is still not submitted, leaving our area subject to speculative development of hundreds of unwanted houses in the wrong places.

We are still waiting to see how the new administration will achieve the promised reduction in waiting time at doctors' surgeries.

The electrification of the waste fleet at the Contract Services Depot is ongoing. The trial of 2 electrified rubbish trucks purchased in recent years has shown that they are expensive and not yet reliable enough. Regardless, two more rubbish trucks have been ordered.

The good news is that £550,000 has been added to reserves. Much of this comes from the fact that government has increased its Grant to Chichester District Council. Some of the rest of the money may be coming from the disappointing extension of the Parking Charges in our Rural Areas to include Sundays in places like Midhurst. We are a Rural district and should be protecting the working vibrancy of the Rural area.

All in all, as a Council, we are still in a good financial position due to the prudent work of Councillors and Officers over many years.

A member of public questioned the lack of promotion of the recent Police Commissioner elections. Mrs Burkhart said she had distributed fliers in the village herself. The turnout was only 25% and many at the meeting felt policing should not be political.

7. REPORTS FROM ORGANISATIONS

NORTHCHAPEL PRIMARY SCHOOL

There was no report.

ST LAURENCE'S CHURCH – Elizabeth Clark (Church Warden)

Elizabeth Clark thanked the Parish Council for its generous contribution to the maintenance of the churchyard. St Laurence's now has 3 mowers and a strimmer. She gave thanks also to all the volunteers who help with the mowing. This is the third year being Interregnum. There was a recent candidate who sadly did not fit the bill so was declined however Sunday services still continue with the support of retired clergy. The Friends of St Laurence's funds have been ringfenced and can only be spent on our village church and its grounds. If there is anyone who would like to support financially, please get in touch. St Laurence's is an integral part of the village and is there for everyone.

VILLAGE SHOP – Mark Tomlinson

The last year has been hard financially and in acquiring staff. We have managed to get an extension on the lease until 2036 with no rent increase which is good news however this is still the highest cost. The shop now receives 22.5% of the fete distribution monies thanks to a change in its constitution. We have managed to reduce broadband and banking costs.

In November the Village Shop Committee held its AGM to let the community know about the financial difficulties. The shop continues to make a loss year after year @ £1,000 per month. There were 40 attendees and all agreed that if we want the shop to continue, we need to use it more. Suggestions at the meeting were to extend ranges especially the budget range. The next focus is a "Survival fund" to get some additional revenue.

Ellie left in September 2023. Libby stepped in to run the Post Office but has since left. We now have a new incumbent, Jo who has experience in retail and is doing the Post Office training; it is hoped this will be open 4 days a week.

Thank you to all the staff and the amazing volunteers.

VILLAGE HALL – Ray Cooper

Bookings are almost back to pre-Covid. Daytime bookings include exercise classes (Pilates, Yoga and Rebounder), Table tennis, Village Lunches and the Afternoon teas. We also have Film nights, Music nights, talks and Bingo plus we are used for meetings and as a Polling station. The Archive room attracts a few visitors and we would love any old photos or documents which residents find.

Like most organisations, we suffer from a lack of committee members especially younger ones. Please consider joining. New ideas are always welcomed.

VILLAGE FETE – Ellie Kinnear

The 2023 fete went very well, weather was great and the committee very energetic with so many helpers on the day and the day before setting up. The gross takings were £21,000 with a surplus of £13,000 of which £11,900 was distributed amongst the five village institutions including donations to the Cricket Club pavilion, Northchapel Primary School and to help pay for a First Aid Course for villagers.

This year's fete is on Saturday 1st June. There is a second parking area thanks to the Rodbers and Rob Champion. It is the same successful format as always plus a few new stalls. Hopefully with good weather and lots of people!

L.R.A – Miles Fairston

The L.R.A is now chaired on a rolling basis. There are 194 members. The Jubilee field is being used much more; parties, walkers, joggers, dogs, cricket net and the 5 a side goals are proving a very popular addition and being used every weekend and during the school holidays. Increased mowing has helped improve the surface. And, of course it is a huge car parking resource for the village not only for the fete but for weddings, funerals and cricket matches. There is some new matting at the entrance to the field thanks to Neil Harding. The left hedge has been left uncut to encourage wildlife and a grant received for a wild flower meadow. The L.R.A finances are relatively healthy at £13,000, helped by fundraising events and donations. Future ideas include boules/pétanque pitch, pool table and table tennis table.

The L.R.A is helping the Cricket Club and very much hopes cricket matches continue on the Village Green.

CRICKET CLUB – Chris Olsen

Chris Olsen and Alastair Sword have taken over the responsibility the Cricket Club from Ray Cooper and Malcolm Caird who have done a great job. Rob Dale continues to prepare the wicket. A fete grant of £2,000 was spent on refurbishing the pavilion including a deep clean, removing lights and putting in a new kitchen as well as a dishwasher donated by residents. It now needs a lick of paint and a new carpet. Hopefully it is now easier to use. The showers are actually working and the ladies loo will have a lock installed!

There are 45 fixtures this year including kids' games on Saturday and Sunday mornings. It is hoped these will increase footfall and income to both the pub and the shop. We need to look at our charges but are aware we cannot push these up too much. We must also look at costs. We are taking this year and will take a comprehensive look at the end of the season. The pavilion can hopefully be rented out for other events but it is very difficult to make any money.

Thanks were given to Chris and Alastair for taking on the Cricket Club. Cricket on the Village Green is an important part of the village.

HORTICULTURAL CLUB – Elizabeth Clark

We now have email addresses for 67 members with 42 paid up members for this year. It costs £5 for the year and you receive 50% off entry to RHS gardens.

Events

Gardeners Question Time was held on 18 April with a turn-out of circa 40 people. 11 new members joined. Panellists included Tessa Mills (Ex Kew & Parham House gardener and designer), Tim Horner (Waratah Gardens) and Phil Austen (Head Gardener at Selham House)

Fete 1 June – LHC will take a plant stall again and this year we will be growing most of the plants ourselves, keeping costs down and increasing profits. The stall usually brings in circa £2k before costs. All proceeds go to the fete committee.

Village Show 17 Aug – This will be the 40th year. Programmes are printed and we're looking forward to a good year.

VILLAGE LUNCH – Erica Meyer

There are 20-25 people who attend regularly with a wonderful team of volunteers who cook and help out including a resident from Easebourne. The lunch is now £5 which is the first increase for 7 years and still very good value. The lunches are enjoyable and continuing even though Erica is stepping down in August. New members are always welcome.

The Chair gave thanks to Erica for her long-standing commitment to the Village Lunch club.

PARISHIONERS FORUM

Thanks were given to Gary Sharp for painting the white posts around the Village Green ahead of the Fete.

There being no other business, the Chairman closed the meeting at 9.25pm. She welcomed all to stay for refreshments.