Lingfield Parish Council

TWELFTH ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY

Minutes of the twelfth Annual Parish Assembly of Lingfield Parish held on Monday 4th April 2011 in the Lingfield Day Centre at 7.30pm

Present:

In the chair – Mr R. Palmer, Chairman, Lingfield Parish Council

Members of the public

Sue Quelch, Julie Hearn, Jan Parris, K. Kaiser-Davies, C. Kaiser-Davies, Ann Ball, John Ball, Judy Mendall, Mary Ayres, Chris D'Avray, Peter Francis, Heather Francis, Frances Dean, Tony Dean, Rita Russell, John Cole, Shirley Kaye, Paul Kaye, C. Vasey, Margaret Vasey

Members of the Parish Council

Graham Marks, Lisa Bangs, Valerie Millar, Fran Palmer, Sonia Perkins, Mary Edwards Surrey County Councillor – Michael Sydney

Tandridge District Councillors - Brian Perkins, Lisa Bangs

In attendance: Fay Elwood, Parish Clerk

1. Chairman's Report

Normally, it is my job to just provide you with an overview of the Council's principal activities over the past year and an account of how we have managed the finances during that time. However, as you are probably aware, this is the last assembly of the current Council and I thought it might be interesting to take a quick look back at our first Assembly in 2008 to remind ourselves of the issues which were uppermost at that time and how things have moved on in the ensuing three years.

Having checked through the minutes of our first annual assembly, I was fascinated to find that, surprise, surprise, parking topped the list of the issues that were most concerning the parishioners and the Council at the end of its first year in office.

Some parishioners – principally the shop owners and businesses - wished to see some control of the amount of time vehicles were allowed to park on the High Street. Others wished to see some provision for free or cheaper parking for local workers in Gun Pit Road car park.

It is therefore uncanny that some three years later, parking is still top of the agenda and that these two particular issues were finally resolved. It has taken all of that time for Surrey County Council to finally agree to the introduction of time limited parking in the High Street. And moreover the actual signs to this effect were installed in the past couple of weeks. It will be intriguing to find out if they have the desired effect. In response to the request for cheaper parking arrangements in the Gun Pit car park, the Parish Council conducted an unsuccessful campaign to persuade TDC to reduce or modify parking fees. Finally in 2010, the Council with the support of the Chamber of

Commerce offered to reimburse Tandridge District Council with the full amount of the parking fees yielded by Gun Pit Car Park each year in return for free parking for all. i.e. a return to the arrangement that preceded the introduction of charges in 2007.

Unbelievably this offer was turned down flat by Tandridge on the grounds that it would undermine their control of car parking—whatever that means. In reality it is my belief that for reasons that defy logic and common sense they are insisting on a standard parking arrangement for the whole of Tandridge regardless of the location. 'What is good for Oxted is good for Lingfield' seems to be the policy. This leaves us with the prospect of a High street and adjacent roads overfull with parked cars whilst the one purpose built car park in the village is half full on most days.

Another key issue that was debated at the Assembly in 2008 was the Parish Council's proposal to improve recreational facilities in the village and in particular those at Talbot Road which we considered had been badly neglected over the years. The assembly agreed that this would be a worthwhile project and the Council were commissioned to look further into how this would be achieved. We, as the Council, quickly came to the conclusion that it would be necessary to obtain funding or finance to achieve any meaningful improvements to the facilities. This in turn would mean that we would have to demonstrate security of tenure. As you may well know, the larger part of the Talbot Road Recreation Ground was originally bequeathed to the village but over time it had become the property of TDC. It was therefore necessary to negotiate a transfer of the freehold or a long term lease in order to progress the issue. Once again the issue came to a head in 2010 when the District Council once again cited their need to 'retain control' of the facility and turned us down flat.

This, it seemed at the time, was the death knell of the project. Fortunately our District Councillor, Brian Perkins, with the support of the other local Councillors, chose to intervene and prevent a complete breakdown of relations between us and TDC; with the result that they have recently agreed to grant us a twenty year lease subject to agreement of detailed terms and conditions. This of course will be the job of the new council as will the subsequent improvement programme itself.

So far from going over old history in looking back over the issues that dominated the Assembly of 2008, it has proved to be wholly relevant to events of the last twelve months. And all of which goes to show it can take quite some time to get things done in local government.

This of course is one of the main frustrations of being a Parish Councillor. The other is the limitations on the freedom of action of the parish council itself. It seems that on almost every key issue, we have to look to either the County or District Council for agreement. And as has been demonstrated on the issues I have just described, neither are the most dynamic or decisive of organisations.

Of course it is possible to argue that the frustrations are made up for by the sense of achievement that comes when you obtain a decision that allows you to make progress with your chosen project. For me however I reached a point last year when the frustrations were uppermost and there seemed little purpose to there being a parish

council at all, and certainly little point in continuing as a councillor beyond the current term. More recently however latest events have brought about a complete change of view on my part. Most importantly in this regard has been the government's decision to introduce what has become known as the 'Localism' bill. This is designed to give greater powers to Parish Councils and local communities and more control over their own environment. I personally find this an exciting prospect and something I should like to be associated with if I have the opportunity. As yet we do not know exactly what it will mean in practice and why as a start we have invited Trevor Leggo to give us the benefit of his greater knowledge of the subject tonight.

As it turned out, the possibilities of greater localism coincided with some more positive news on specific issues affecting Lingfield, notably in respect of Talbot Road. This leads me to hope that we may also see some movement on the parking issue in due course and indeed the traffic calming scheme for Godstone Road that we recently campaigned against. All of which has persuaded me to believe that it is perhaps worth persisting and persevering even if immediate progress is disappointing and frustrating.

Going back to the Assembly of 2008, I was also interested to take a look at the finances for that year. Again they provide some interest set against what we did in this respect over the past twelve months. Total expenditure then was just over £40,000. This year total expenditure was some £37,000 which taking into account inflation, represents a significant reduction. The precept in 2008 was £32,000 and last year £31,000.

Last year we did however spend less that we had planned, mainly because of the lack of progress on Talbot Road. Also we again had no opportunity to spend the £2500 set aside for traffic calming in Godstone Road because SCC did not consider it sufficiently important. Funny old world isn't it. Overall we have budgeted to spend up to £49000 next year and have set a precept back to the 2008 level of £32000.

Other activities over the past twelve months which merit a mention at this point are the successful project to provide new allotments in Newchapel Road for which we are grateful to Mrs Carol Barnett for granting us a five year lease of the land. We are also grateful to Mike Redmond for providing all of the drawings needed to obtain planning permission which has yet to be finalised. Financially it has been made possible by sharing the costs of converting the site with Dormansland PC who will also share the allotments and because we are also hopeful of a lottery grant that will reduce the cost dramatically.

The new play facilities in Jenners Field, courtesy of a Playbuilder grant from the Dept of Education, as well as (bless them) the Tandridge District and Surrey County Councils. Indeed neither we, nor any of the local councillors, can claim any real credit for this and for once it is a pleasure to record our thanks to these two organisations for making this possible.

The parish council were also very pleased to have been of assistance with the reopening of the Youth Club which we hope will have a successful future.

Two other issues that will largely fall to the new Council to resolve or progress are the future of Lingfield Library and the management of highways matters in conjunction with other parish councils comprising the Lingfield Division, also known as the hub.

You will have heard or read that Surrey County Council have proposed that a number of their libraries should be operated in partnership with local communities – I believe eleven in all including Lingfield. Although this has been dressed up as an exercise in localism, it seems to me to be designed as a cost off-loading exercise. The idea is that the County Council provide the building and the books, the local community become responsible for the staff.

Unfortunately Surrey seem to have lost sight of the fact that Lingfield already provides the building – the Guest House that was bequeathed to the village for that purpose and for which Surrey pay the trust an annual rent. Michael Sydney, our county Councillor, has subsequently agreed with the County that Lingfield will be treated as a special case. We now await the further proposals from the county before we know if there will be any involvement of the Parish council or other local organisations in the future management or financing of the library,

On the matter of highways management, it has already been agreed that we and other parish councils in the Lingfield Division will take over the management of grass cutting throughout the Division from Surrey County Council who will still be responsible for the cost. The scheme will run as a trial for a year and if successful be expanded to other areas of highways maintenance. To be frank, there are many unresolved questions as to how this will be made to work but as I said at the outset, it is one for the new Council to take on in the coming year.

Finally I cannot close without mentioning the theft of plaques from the war memorial and the associated vandalism. Our Parish Clerk worked miracles in managing to arrange for repairs to be carried out in time for Remembrance Day and at no cost to the taxpayers. Which was why it was so outrageous that an anonymous local trader, aided and abetted by a local journalist, not noted for the objectivity or accuracy of his reporting, should charge the Parish Council with betrayal because the donation it accepted for the repairs was not paid to them. This in spite of the fact that Fay had taken every effort to ensure that acceptance of the donation would not prejudice any claim for compensation by any local trader. But as they say in Fleet Street 'why confuse a good story with the facts!'

I also take some pride in the success we achieved in publicising local concerns over the proposed traffic calming scheme for Godstone Road; and the opposition to the scheme that was shown in the petition we conducted and at the public meeting held as part of the public consultation conducted by the SCC. It remains to be seen if it will have the desired effect on the powers that be of course but I believe they will rue the day if they choose to ignore the strength of feeling over this issue.

To close my last report to the parish, may I just say that after four years in office I believe that Lingfield is still as good a place to live, as it was four years ago, and in some respect perhaps a little better –at least I should like to hope so. It remains for me to wish the new Council every success in keeping it that way over the next four years. Thank you for listening.

2. District and County Council Issues

Michael Sydney reported on SCC's consultation on 'On street parking charges'. The proposal is to introduce time limited parking restricted to 15 minutes but Lingfield has already adopted a 'free for two hours policy' which puts us at the forefront of the County's proposals.

He further reported that the consultation period on the proposed traffic calming scheme in Godstone Road has now ended and David Hodge has asked to be kept informed of progress on the matter. Surrey County Council has accepted the fact that there was an inaccuracy in initial reports and Lingfield Library is in fact a unique case in the county and will be treated as such.

Referring to the Hub Project, Michael reported that this is the first of its kind in Surrey although successful arrangements are working in West Sussex. The idea came from his 'door step' canvassing and SCC is 100% committed to making the idea a reality. The initial project is for parishes to manage the grass cutting contract but if successful, this could be extended to hedges and ditches and cleaning of signs.

Tony Dean asked whether localisation implies no increase in cost. Ron Palmer replied that SCC will pay for essential work but parishes could pay for enhancements if it chose to. The amount of money to pay for grass cutting in the Lingfield division in 2011/12 is £34,000 but this will be negotiated annually. Due to the length of time it is taking to get the project up and running, the Hub is obliged to use the existing contractor for the first year. Local contractors can be considered for subsequent years.

Brian Perkins reported that TDC is looking to support local communities and small businesses. Small businesses suffered when the gas mains were replaced. Some did manage to get a reduction in their business rates but this was no real compensation for the reduction in trade. TDC members admire the vision of Lingfield Parish Council and have tried to support it when they can e.g. Talbot Road. TDC opposes the introduction of charges for on-street parking. The correct pressure can bring about change at the District Council.

Lisa Bangs referred to the planning permission granted on Occasionally Yours and expressed concern that TDC is accepting an increase in housing without investment in our infrastructure. The £10,000 to improve the vitality of the village in the section 106 agreement for this application has not given consideration to how this could be used. Lisa is pleased to see the new playground in Jenners Field being well used but referred to the fact that there is no fence around the facility. Although 'experts' have advised that fencing inhibits children's creativity she feels that the health and safety

issues are more important. Jenners Field is regularly used by dog walkers and the risk of injury and dog fouling outweighs anything else. She has organised a petition to present to the District Council to ask them to install fencing around the play area. On the subject of the proposed traffic calming scheme, she hopes that the matter will be referred back to the Tandridge Local Committee. She has written to the Chief Executive of Surrey County Council about the fact that the Highways Manager was unable to answer questions and the developer's agent was answering them instead. She hopes that SCC will be objective about its decision and it could not be denied that the objection from local residents was overwhelming.

3. Presentation by Trevor Leggo, Director of Surrey and Sussex Associations of Local Councils

Trevor explained that he looks after some 320 Town and Parish Councils across three counties. He referred to a visit in 2009 by a delegation of government officials from Bermuda, when Lingfield was chosen as a good example of a Parish Council.

The Prime Minister has ambitions for a 'Big Society' and the 'Localism' bill is the legislation which will create the framework for this. He was careful to point out that his presentation is based on what we know at the moment. Consultation is ongoing and representations will shape the final bill.

He outlined the main areas which are relevant to parish councils:
Abolition of the Standards Board
The Community Right to Buy
The Community Right to Challenge
Local referendums
Right to veto excessive council tax increases
Neighbourhood Plans

Referring to the abolition of the Standards Board, the Register of Interests will remain, as will the Nolan principles. District Councils will have discretion on whether they operate a Standards Board. Many District Councils have indicated they would scrap it because there is no funding for it. It may be that parishes, or groups of parishes, would have to police each others' activities. The worst cases would be dealt with by Police as a criminal case.

Parishes will be able to produce a 'Neighbourhood Plan' which would become a supplementary planning document. These would be statutory documents, rather than the non-statutory village or parish plans. Neighbourhood Plans would provide an opportunity for local spatial planning (mini local plans). District Councils will be obliged to offer support and advice and this could prove extremely labour intensive for the planning officers, especially if several parishes undertake the exercise at the same time. The plan is prepared by the community but subject to an independent examination. It is not yet known who would carry out the examination but it is likely to be the Planning Inspectorate. There would then need to be a referendum which is likely to cost in the region of £4000.

Tony Dean asked how communities will benefit. Trevor answered that villages will be shaped at a local level. If a site comes up for development and a parish does not have a neighbourhood plan, then you have nothing to fight it with. A plan gives the community more power to resist development proposals.

How long does the plan last? Details not yet known. Graham Marks asked how often it is reviewed. The South East Plan was for 20 years but it is more likely that neighbourhood plans will be for 5 years, although this is a guess.

John Ball asked for confirmation that the plan is binding after adoption. Yes it is.

Chris D'Avray asked who pays for the cost of a plan. This information is not yet spelt out, but some think it will be paid for from the new homes bonus that District Councils will receive.

Lisa Bangs stated that TDC's response to the new homes bonus is that they don't like the idea because money would become the driving force for development rather than what is good for the area.

Moving on to the Community Right to Build, this is designed to meet a range of infrastructure and housing needs. It is proposed, that under certain circumstances, a community can proceed with a building project without planning consent. Trevor warned that this can be divisive and quoted an example of an affordable housing project in Sussex.

The Community Right to Veto Excessive Council Tax Increases would not be applicable to Lingfield because the cost of a referendum would outweigh any potential reduction in council tax.

The General Power of Competence may replace the Power of Wellbeing. This would mean that Parish and Town Councils would be able to do anything which it feels would benefit the community as long as it is lawful. The bill proposes that Community and Voluntary groups will have the power to challenge the district and county councils and take over any service which it thinks is not being run properly. The council must respond and if they don't agree must explain why. For example, we could say we want to take over the running of car parks and they may respond to the effect that it is not in the public interest.

The 'Community Right to Buy' refers to facilities which make the community work, eg. Recreation land or a solitary village shop. The bill imposes a responsibility on the district councils to maintain a register of village assets. If an owner of a village asset wishes to sell the property, they would be obliged to give the community six months to put forward an offer before selling the asset on the open market.

Referring to the Hub project, John Ball asked what is meant by 'Managed by PCs'. Michael Sydney explained that the Chief Executive of SCC is committed to following the examples in Sussex, whereby clusters of parish undertake highways work on behalf of the county. This could be extended to youth services and community

transport. Parish Councils can choose whether to raise the precept to give a better service or can use volunteers. There is not a single prescription for how this will work. The reality is that county council budgets are being reduced and there will come a time when they have to rely on the parish precept to pay for non-statutory services. Parishes tax with consent and should consult their residents.

4. Members' Reports

Planning – Reported by Mary Edwards

In spite of strong opposition from the Parish Council and many residents, the development for affordable housing at The Bays, Godstone Road, was permitted, on condition that some traffic calming was installed on Godstone Road. The traffic calming plans were approved but, as you know, a public consultation, arranged by Surrey County Council in the form of a public meeting took place on 24 March 2011 at which residents voiced their serious concerns about this scheme on the grounds of safety and the enormous traffic congestion that this would inevitably cause. It is now hoped that this matter will go before the Surrey County Council Local Committee for further consideration in view of the very strongly held views by the Parish Council and parishioners that this scheme should not go ahead.

The new housing association flats on Town Hill are available to anyone on the Tandridge Housing waiting list and will be allocated in order of housing need, not only Lingfield residents. This is in contrast to the development at The Bays as this was only granted as a Rural Exception as it is Green Belt land and therefore only local residents or families of local residents will be permitted to live there.

Planning permission has been granted for a development on the land at Occasionally Yours in Lingfield Common Road but the owner has not yet decided to sell.

The developers of the previous Squash Club, opposite the Racecourse, have applied for an extension of the original permission granted to them as the plans to demolish the existing buildings and construct completely new ones were turned down.

We are still concerned that there are empty premises in the High Street and the butcher is now about to close.

Protection of the Green Belt, which surrounds Lingfield, is of prime importance, as is the Conservation Area within the village. Whilst it is appreciated that new housing is needed, it is the Planning Committee's job to try and make sure that any new developments are in keeping with and sensitive to the character of Lingfield Village and sustainable within the infrastructure of the available resources and amenities, such as the doctor's surgery, schools, road network etc. Developers are always on the lookout for land and it is the Planning Committee's task to make sure that the Green Belt is protected and any planning application is carefully scrutinised.

Village Environment – Reported by Graham Marks

We are probably all aware by now that 8 plaques on our war memorial, commemorating 59 parishioners killed in the first World War, and 30 parishioners killed in the second World War, were stolen in October last year. The sadness and disgust at such an act, and so close to Remembrance Day, was prevalent throughout our village, the surrounding area and the press. The plaques were located and recovered and we managed to get them reinstated a few days before 11th November. A local person has been charged with 'possession of stolen property' and will appear in Guildford Crown Court on 20th April 2011. The total cost of reinstatement was £585 and was paid for by a donation from Southern Gas Networks.

Grit bins have been installed in three locations:- Community Centre Car Park; East Grinstead Road and adjacent to the public toilets in Godstone Road. The public will be encouraged to use them.

We were involved in the consultation of the local bus service and we await the outcome.

The oak tree by the pond has had some light pruning this year and we have been advised that the tree has been used as an example at the Oslo Tree Federation Conference in March 2011. A translated script can be obtained from Alistair Durkin at Tandridge District Council

Grants and Funding - Reported by Fran Palmer

The Parish Council allocated £6300 in its budget for grants. £3000 was paid to maintain the burial grounds and £300 to support the Citizens Advice Bureau outreach sessions. This left £3000 to be awarded as discretionary grants. This money was allocated as follows:-

Lingfield Cricket Club £1000 to provide safety nets
Community Care £800 to help fund Meals on Wheels and the Lunch Club
St Catherine's Hospice - £200 towards running costs
Lingfield Christmas Lights – up to £1000 match funding
Lingfield Youth Club £500 to help with set up costs

We also arranged for the funds from the previous youth club treasurer to be transferred to the new club.

Parish Facilities – Reported by Mary Edwards

TALBOT ROAD RECREATION GROUND

Three parish councillors, Ron Palmer, Sonia Perkins and Mary Edwards have responsibility for Talbot Road Recreation Ground.

Tandridge District Council is to grant the Parish Council a twenty year lease, in principle, on Talbot Road Recreation Ground, excluding the area which is designated for the new surgery in the future. This would enable the Parish Council to apply for

grants in order to make improvements and provide better facilities for the use of the residents. The football pitch has been put forward for the Queen Elizabeth Fields in Trust challenge and we are hoping this might open some doors to funding opportunities.

The Allotments, the Lingfield Wildlife Area, and the Community Centre are the responsibility of Lisa Bangs and Mary Edwards. The Wildlife area is entirely managed by a separate committee and two councillors sit on this committee. The Community Centre is also managed by and leased to, a separate committee.

ALLOTMENTS

There are twenty one allotments situated at Centenary Fields. This land is owned by the Parish Council and allotment plots are let to tenants on a yearly basis at the cost of £20.

The Parish Council is responsible for the maintenance of the fencing surrounding the allotment area, the cost of which comes out of reserves. Otherwise the allotments are virtually self-funding.

The Parish Council, together with Dormansland Parish Council, has recently arranged to lease some additional land for more allotments from a resident in Lingfield and it is hoped that these will be available shortly, when the land has been prepared. We would like to express our gratitude to Mrs Barnett for offering her land for this project.

There are regular working parties held at the allotments, which have served to encourage the members to assist each other and to make sure that the area is kept tidy. These have resulted in a great improvement in the general state of the plots and surrounding area.

LINGFIELD NATURE RESERVE

The Nature Reserve is managed by a separate committee which includes two Parish Council members. Part of the land is owned by the Parish Council and the remainder by Tandridge District Council. During 2010/11 it received a grant from the Parish Council of £1,500, in addition to the £2,000 paid direct for the mowing contract. A £500 maintenance budget was set aside, adding up to a total budget of £4,000.

LINGFIELD & DORMANSLAND COMMUNITY CENTRE

The Community Centre is owned by the Parish Council and leased to a management committee on a fully repairing lease. No budget is set for the Community Centre because we do not carry the responsibility for repairs. However, the Parish Council does, from time to time, provide a grant towards the cost of larger items such as essential electrical repairs. The Parish Council office,

based in the Community Centre, is rented back from the management committee.

Highways, Traffic and Parking - Reported by Ron Palmer

On the wider issues of the state of our roads in general, the Parish Council has been pursuing the vexed subject of pot holes as indeed as every other council that I can think of. There is some progress but not nearly enough and we are very conscious as are Surry Highways of our concerns.

In December we also presented to Surrey Highways via our County Councillor Michael Sydney, a comprehensive report on the state of Lingfield's Roads in their entirety. This will be used as the basis for planning the repairs programme throughout the Division over the next three years.

Turning to parking, I have already provided you with an account of developments over the past twelve months in my earlier report. However it might be worth pointing out that Tandridge DC said that they might review their decision in the light of the introduction of time limited parking in the High street. We shall pursue that possibility in the next council

As far as the time limited parking provisions are concerned, you might be interested to learn that the restrictions are for waiting limited to two hours with no return before one hour. Also the restrictions apply to most of the high street. Regrettably, it was necessary to omit the space in front of Lingfield Tandoori for technical reasons. This followed further representations by the Parish council.

Finally a word on Speedwatch; we continued to monitor traffic and reduce speeding through lingfield up to the autumn of last year. Regettably my own health problems, as well as the loss of some volunteers, meant that we had to suspend operations until the Spring. However, once the elections are over I am hopeful that we shall have sufficient volunteers to resume operations and I should be very happy to hear from any of you willing to help in this worthwhile work in making our village safer.

5. Other matters arising

Chris D'Avray asked if there has been any indication of extra policing of the time limited parking. Ron Palmer answered 'not at the moment'. We have tried to buy more warden time but TDC were unable to arrange for this although they did increase the number of hours a warden is present in Lingfield.

Brian Perkins explained that as a cost-cutting exercise, Reigate and Banstead Council has taken over responsibility for parking enforcement in Tandridge.

Julie Hearn asked if the Parish Council has responded to the planning application for three houses on the site of the Vicarage. Mary Edwards responded by saying that the Parish Council does not object to a replacement Vicarage but does object to extra houses on the site.

Tony Dean referred to the state of the roads in the county and expressed the view that the local authority should be looking after its infrastructure better. Ron Palmer explained that the Parish Council has reported to Michael Sydney on the repairs

required in all roads in the village. It was noted that SCC will be receiving some extra funding to improve roads in Surrey.

Heather Francis asked if the Parish Council has the power to get householders to cut hedges. The reply was that Surrey County Council has this authority but the Parish Council will report on her behalf if she provides a list to the clerk.

John Ball asked about the specification for filling potholes. It is hoped that the situation will improve with the new contractor.

Lisa Bangs stated that SCC is not providing the accountable services we deserve and residents should lobby SCC for not delivering value for money. Margaret Vasey said that SCC Highways will respond to complaints by email. Residents must persist!

Mrs Ball asked for an explanation of the Hub project and this was described.

Brian Perkins explained about the difference between expectation and what is provided, stating that local hubs can respond better to local problems. The hub will not be responsible for gritting. Some debate took place on the liability when paths are gritted and whether this liability would extend to a member of the public.

Finally, the issue of cars parked on the kerb near to the exit of Mount Pleasant Road was raised. This needs to be reported to the Police as they are still responsible for enforcement when a vehicle is causing an obstruction.

Meeting closed at 9.55pm