

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING OF STAPLEHURST
held in the South Hall, Staplehurst Village Centre on
Monday 12th May 2008

1. **PRESENT** – Thirty residents signed the attendance list together with twelve Parish Councillors, County & Borough Councillor Eric Hotson, Borough Councillor Richard Lusty, PC Marc Pennicott, Assistant Parish Clerk and Parish Clerk.
2. **APOLOGIES** – Councillors Collins, Munn and Perry.
3. **MINUTES OF THE 2007 ANNUAL PARISH MEETING** – These had been circulated and were taken as read. Approval of the Minutes was proposed by Councillor Knowlden, seconded by Councillor Wood, agreed by the meeting then signed as a true record by the Chairman of the Parish Council. There were no matters arising.
4. **STAPLEHURST PARISH COUNCIL FINANCIAL STATEMENT** – Copies of the audited Statement of Accounts had been circulated. Cash assets totalled £148,705.87 out of which reserves were ear-marked in the following sums:- General Fund £28,190.83, Youth Forum £5,000, Staplehurst Partnership grant £1,500, Burial Authority provision £5,927.18, Jubilee Sports project £54,150.73, Village Centre Contingency Fund £15,688.88 and £38,248.25 underspend carried forward towards the budget for 2008/2007. There were no questions raised.
5. **GYBBONS CHARITY ACCOUNT** – The balance at 31.12.2007 stood at £3,148.68. Income received during the previous year from War Stock and Deposit interest totalled £66.04. Donations of £100 were made.
6. **REPORT BY STAPLEHURST PARISH COUNCIL CHAIRMAN** – Councillor Arger thanked Parish Councillors for their attendance at meetings throughout the previous year as well as the support of County and Borough Councillor Eric Hotson, Borough Councillor Richard Lusty and Anne Widdecombe MP. Special thanks were expressed to Malcolm and Councillor Joan Buller for their work to ensure the Speedwatch equipment was well used and new volunteers trained. The loss of the allotments to the Maidstone Housing Trust had caused concern and upset and regretfully negotiations to re-establish an allotment provision had been unsuccessful to date. The Planning Committee of the Parish Council had continued to work hard and expressed concerns on many housing issues. Chairman of Planning, Councillor Wendy Green had been a regular attendee at MBC Planning Committees to ensure the parish views were heard in Maidstone. Thanks to the efforts of Councillor Knowlden and Franks the YAP08 activities week had been a great success and it was understood the club was now running regularly. Policing had remained a concern within the parish but the policing team had now been joined by PCSO Pete Gardner who was providing excellent service and liaison. The Chairman also thanked the Parish Clerk, Sue Bassett and Assistant Clerk, Maria Norris, for their work throughout the year and in particular for organising the excellent Playscheme. The new Medical Centre had now opened with grateful thanks to Robin Kenworthy and Robin Oakley for their efforts in continuing to “keep the pot stirred” to ensure resolution.

The Annual Parish Meeting was also for the parish to report and comment upon the previous twelve months and to highlight activities and achievements. The Chairman closed by thanking everyone who had contributed to community life in Staplehurst,

including partners of Councillors, local residents active within the many village groups and the Clerk and Assistant Clerk for all their work.

Finally, Chairman Arger paid a special tribute to Charlie Samuell who had retired recently following 12 years work as the Parish Caretaker. He had worked hard with great warmth of personality, provided great support to the parish through cutting hedges, repairing fences and cleaning up litter, etc. A framed drawing of the parish was then presented to Charlie as a token of this parish's appreciation of his work.

7. **REPORT BY BOROUGH COUNCILLOR LUSTY** – Councillor Lusty began by thanking the parish for voting for him in 2007. Since he was first elected in 1998 his share of the vote had nearly doubled and he was grateful for this. He reported that he currently had responsibilities within the Borough Council as Chairman of Planning, Development administration, KCC Gypsy and Traveller group and on a number of select committees. He was also involved with the Village Centre Management Committee and held monthly Borough Surgeries at Staplehurst Library. The highlights of working within planning were the increasing number of "grand designs" such as Crossways and he hoped that such new technology would filter through to ordinary homes in due course. Through the Local Development Advisory Group the parish had given views to MBC and the development pressure on the countryside around villages was increasing. Councillor Lusty stated that he always tried to further the interests of Staplehurst at borough level. Within the KCC Gypsy & traveller select committee, the needs of gypsies around Kent had to be assessed and sites found for growing families. It would be reporting back to Government soon. Councillor Lusty stated that whilst he had recently had to leave the Village Centre Management Committee, he would continue to support where he could. Over the past year he had attended 121 meetings, 11 training meetings, a 4-day residential course, spent 426 hours, sent over 1,850 emails and received over 450 telephone calls. He expressed disappointment with the Library surgeries as they were not always reported in the Kent Messenger and often only a couple of people turn up. It is a good opportunity for residents to talk with Councillors over their concerns such as parking at The Parade or Medical Centre. Councillor Lusty closed with thanks to the Parish Council that was doing a fantastic job, particularly on the Planning Committee as the responses from Staplehurst were good. He encouraged residents to come and speak to Borough Councillor Hotson and himself for the facts as often issues were misrepresented/misunderstood by local newspapers.
8. **REPORT BY COUNTY & BOROUGH COUNCILLOR HOTSON** – Councillor Hotson described his twin-hatted role at MBC and KCC where he was also responsible for 5 parishes within the Maidstone Rural South area. He praised Councillor Lusty for his work meeting parishioners every month and he deserved the support of the electorate. On County Council matters he referred to issues such as Operation Stack that were having an adverse effect on this county and plans to build a new lorry park at Ashford for 500-800 foreign lorries balanced with the damage to the environment. Funding for that would have to come from Kent. The new initiative of the Freedom Pass for 11-16s to have a free bus pass (£50 admin fee) would be brought out in June and hopefully reduce traffic/mum's taxi. The Concessionary Fares scheme costs £2m in Maidstone and the Government directive to bring forward its use to 9 am would have a major cost implication. Problems created by the transporting of earth through the village to the Fish Farm at Monks Lake had been difficult to deal with. However, a temporary stop notice had been served and negotiations for a full stop notice could follow. There were good things going on in the parish such as the "Kent's Got Talent" initiative to encourage young people to flaunt their talent. There were Kent Youth courses and

action for deprived young people. A grant had been made to help the parish establish the new Football Changing room facility at Jubilee. The involvement of the Parish Council and particularly Councillor Franks helped to secure the incredible grant from the Football Foundation which would ensure the return of all Clubs to Staplehurst. Grants had also been given to the churches for their improvement projects and to Christmas lights. Kent Highways continued to be a problem due to lack of funding and severe winter conditions. A £1m blitz of potholes had taken place in April when over 11,000 potholes had been repaired. Control of Kent Highways had now been returned to the county and a reorganisation of staff and premises was under way. Assurances had been received that major works on footways and trees would be undertaken in this parish. Councillor Hotson closed by referring to the problems that had arisen with the state of the school playing field after the construction of the Medical Centre. The school had not been able to use the playing field for eighteen months. It had now been inspected and negotiations were continuing to address the health and safety issues raised by the school. KCC would be making good the surface soon.

9. **YOUTH WORK REPORT and YAP08 POSTER COMPETITION** – Councillor Knowlden reported on the Youth Activities Project (YAP08) that had been launched with a poster competition (a prize was presented to the winner, Aiden Murch). The Parish Council had worked in partnership with the Youth Club and ran a successful week of activities in April for an average of 16 young people per day at the Youth Club. It had provided them with somewhere to go in the holidays and been considered a success by all. It was hoped that a three-week session in the summer holidays would follow, subject to a successful grant application to help pay for the cost of leaders, equipment and outings.

Steve Brown, Rural Detached Youth Worker then gave a report on the work that was being done in this parish by Natalie since January 2008. Up to thirty young people were using the Youth Club building on Monday evenings which was opened by KCC Staff to target under 14s and work alongside the Tuesday evening Youth Club. Activities and residential events had been organised and Youth Opportunities Grant applications were being put together to buy more equipment. Information sessions had been held on sexual health, drugs and alcohol issues. Three young people had helped to interview potential staff for the Tuesday evening sessions which were also supported by Community Warden Chris Lomax and PCSO Pete Gardner. Staff would need to be trained re: teenage strategy. A variety of other projects were envisaged; inter-parish football, rural taxi project, summer activity programme, grant bids for CCTV and alarm system to enable more use of the Youth club building after school. Steve Brown thanked the Parish Council for its support of the youth and hoped it would continue in the future.

10. **STAPLEHURST ACTION PLAN UPDATE** – Roy Laming reported on the work that was being achieved with the volunteers working on the SE Development Agency initiative. They were currently collecting local opinions and views, which was very time consuming but would help to shape the plan. An electronic survey went live on 1st February 2008 and there had been 120 respondents covering 66 postcodes to date. Leaflet drops had increased awareness and returns and it would continue to be promoted this year. New sources of funding would be available once the results had been analysed as grant applications must be supported by clear evidence of need. A short presentation of the results achieved to date was given and the Action Plan itself would be developed after a sufficient representative response had been achieved. It was hoped to complete the work over the coming year.

11. **POLICE REPORT** – PC Marc Pennicott’s report was circulated to the meeting and would be filed with these minutes. He fielded a number of questions and comments from the floor. It was emphasised that crimes had significantly reduced by 21% and the policing coverage with PC, Community Warden and PCSO had provided the greatest coverage for many years. PACT meetings had not been well supported by the community but the police were active in other areas, such as mobile police stations on Tuesday evenings monthly. Policing had not been mentioned as needing attention within the Partnership survey which provides evidence of the excellent police coverage currently being enjoyed.

12. **REPORTS FROM LOCAL VOLUNTARY GROUPS** – Seventeen written reports from local groups were also circulated and would be filed for historical reference.

Robin Oakley reported verbally that the **Friends of Staplehurst Health Centre** provided support to staff, bought additional equipment and held health promotion evenings and two open mornings. The Friends were responsible for raising support for the PCT meeting at which 600 residents had attended to discuss bids for the future management of the Health Centre. As a result the West Malling group took over management on 1st May and Community Nurses and Dentistry (provided by the Beaconsfield Dental Practice) would begin in June. The Friends had put out four newsletters with the Village Update, held a Christmas Draw and had a presence at the Carnival selling baby clothes, blankets and cards to raise funds. Ken Collins added that the Weald Club for the Disabled had donated a scooter which was available for parishioner’s use. Details were available at the Health Centre.

Pam Payne, in addition to her written report, commented that exciting things were occurring in the parish and the WI would wish to be more involved with other groups such as working with Sobell Lodge, at the hospital or Health Centre. Some joined up thinking was needed.

13. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Mrs Roots commented that she had been horrified by how far away (at Poyntell Road) the nearest Fire hydrant point had been for the Jubilee Playing Field. That and the locked gates and height barrier had caused problems and delay to the Fire Service in dealing with the recent changing room fire.

Mr Hegarty considered that the filling of potholes in April had been “bodged” and should have been repaired properly in the first place. Mr Bassett commented that Kent roads were the most disgusting in the country. Government ought to be giving more money to Kent due to the large number of lorry movements and concentration of traffic in this county.

The meeting closed at 21:30

.....(Chairman)