



Staplehurst Parish Council
ANNUAL REPORT
2004-2005

Staplehurst Parish Council

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Staplehurst Parish Council

Established 1894

Staplehurst Parish Council represents an electorate of 4554 people living within approximately 2,230 homes. The population census figure recorded in 1991 was 6,003. This represented an increase of 217 people during the previous 10 years.

The Parish Council is made up of 15 Councillors. Three new Councillors were co-opted during the year to replace the elected councillors who wished to resign for a variety of personal reasons. Co-opted Councillors have exactly the same status as elected Councillors and all will serve until the next Parish Council election in 2007 or earlier resignation.

Full Council meets monthly on the third Monday at 8 p.m. in the South Hall, Staplehurst Village Centre. Planning Committee meets on the first and third Mondays at 7 p.m. and Amenities Committee meets on the third Monday monthly at 8 p.m. Finance Committee meets quarterly by arrangement.

In addition to membership of Committees, many parish councillors also work within sub-committees. Sub committees have no spending powers or direct influence on the Full Council and can include members of the public, in an advisory capacity. Parish Councillors also represent the Parish Council on outside bodies for good liaison and communication within the community. Full details follow.

The Parish Office is open to the public four mornings a week for enquiries, sales of MBC Green Sacks and other council-related issues between 9 & 11 a.m. Planning application papers and other Council documents can be viewed on request. Staplehurst Parish Council has adopted Standing Orders and Financial Regulations.



Chairman's Annual Report 2004-2005

Staplehurst Parish Council is very active and business-like and uses its powers and duties very carefully to benefit best this parish. Much attention and consultation is undertaken with parishioners, Borough and County Councillors, MP, Police Officers and other partners.

Through a variety of personal and professional reasons, 3 Councillors resigned during the past year and the Council was sorry to lose their input. In particular Maureen Green was much involved with the success of the upgrading of Surrenden Play Area with Councillor Plant and Ann Hanish, who had begun the ball rolling on this project some two years previously. The new play equipment for Under 12's and the teenage ball court area has been well used and much appreciated since its official opening in July 2004.

During the past year, much preparation work was done towards the creation of a new burial area adjoining the Churchyard. A very successful joint Playscheme with Headcorn was held, together with a variety of summer activities for young people. The Christmas Lights display was extended yet again and will continue this year. A parish survey was circulated on the future of the Village Centre, which indicated some support. A new committee was then created to continue running Staplehurst Village Centre on a voluntary basis.

Throughout the year, Councillors have attended many meetings and guided action to ensure the best possible services are received by this parish. Issues encompassing highways, policing, medical centre, cleansing, maintenance, planning, etc., have all come under parish council scrutiny throughout the past year. Some issues, such as the medical centre, still await completion despite our best efforts.

Work has also been done to improve communication and publicity within the parish. Quarterly Village Updates delivered by volunteers throughout the parish, Website Village Forum and the establishment of e-groups for the dissemination of Parish Council information have all been maintained and improved upon over this past year.

In addition, an application for Quality Parish Council status was made and we are currently waiting to hear whether the hard work of Staplehurst Parish Council is of sufficiently high standard to be awarded this national accolade.

Income & Expenditure Account

For the year ended 31st March 2005

INCOME	2004/2005
Parish Precept	61,000.00
MBC Concurrent Functions Grant	27,134.00
MBC one-off Grant—play project	23,200.00
Other play project Grants & interest	18,367.18
Playscheme grant & fees	1,338.00
Deposit Interest on general fund	4,053.69
Youth forum & Skaters deposit	1,714.97
Donations towards Christmas Lights	340.00
Sales, miscellaneous fees & donations	1,008.21
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	£138,156.05
 EXPENDITURE	
Play Area Project	111,306.53
General Administration	37,432.04
Loan repayment on Village Centre	15,000.00
Churchyard Maintenance	5,112.83
Parish Street Lighting & furniture	3,569.32
Playscheme & Summer activities	2,282.50
Caretakers' wages & equipment	2,030.10
Jubilee Sports Field Maintenance	1,244.34
Youth Club maintenance	1,205.10
Surrenden Playing field maintenance	1,100.21
Christmas Lights	1,916.48
Donations & Allotment Lease	940.00
	<hr/>
	£183,151.45

Balance Sheet

For the year ended 31st March 2005

LONG TERM ASSETS

None

CURRENT ASSETS

VAT Recoverable	411.95
Cash In Hand	169,385.99
	<u>169,797.94</u>

CURRENT LIABILITIES

Creditors	(4,508.06)
	<u>£165,289.88</u>

REPRESENTED BY:

General Fund	32,895.15
Village Centre Contingency	15,184.52
Ongoing Project Reserves:	
Burial Authority Provision	23,864.17
Jubilee Sports Playing Field	57,330.00
CCTV	3,500.00
Surrenden Playing Field	24,417.70
Reserves/Underspends c/f	8,098.34
	<u>£165,289.88</u>

The preceding two statements are only a summary of the accounts. Copies of the full Statement of Accounts were available at the Annual Parish Meeting on 9th May 2005 and now from the Parish Office or downloading from the parish website at: www.staplehurstvillage.org.uk

Staplehurst Parish Council accounts are audited quarterly by Iden Business Services and the Annual Audit Return is made to the Audit Commission. The requisite Public Notice is given for electors to inspect the accounts annually.

Planning Committee



Councillor Wendy Green, Chairman of the Planning Committee. This Committee's remit is to inspect and make fully considered recommendations on all planning applications affecting this parish. Maidstone Borough Council is the Planning Authority and makes the final decision based on all planning legislation and guidance.

Planning Committee members are encouraged to visit every application site before considering the application at committee. On behalf of the parish the Planning Committee strives to respond to Maidstone Borough Council Planning Department with valid material planning responses to all applications. If a planning application is referred to the Maidstone Planning committee, the parish view is usually enforced in person by attendance at Maidstone Town Hall by a Parish Councillor.

Parish Councillors are frequently lobbied by planning applicants and objectors from the parish. Councillors take great care to formally declare such lobbying at planning committee. Any pecuniary or non-pecuniary interests in applications that have close personal interest are also declared and Councillors then withdraw from the meeting to avoid any perceived influence in the decision process.

Amenities Committee



This Committee deals with most other Council work not related to Planning or Finance. It oversees capital projects, parish street lighting, allotments and playing facilities. It also considers environmental issues, supports Playscheme and Youth Club and liaises with Kent Highways and Community Police. Work done by committees reduces the length of Full Council Meetings.

Finance Committee



The Finance Committee is led by the Chairman of the Parish Council, Margaret Arger and supported by Vice Chairman Barry Franks, Chairmen of Planning & Amenities committees plus Councillors Joan Buller and John Swannick.

This committee meets quarterly to monitor overall progress of parish projects and spending as well as undertaking annual reviews of staffing, salaries, insurances, risk assessments and asset management. It also oversees the annual budget and recommends the amount of precept for consideration and adoption by Full Council. For the financial year 05/06 the Parish Precept is £62,900 equating to £27.20 Per Band D property.

Financial Matters

Parish Councils are able to raise money directly from the public under Section 150 of the Local Government Act 1972. Collected by Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) with the Council Tax, this is known as the Parish Precept. Other sources of income are received through project grant funding bids, Concurrent Functions grant from MBC and miscellaneous sales, fees, interest and donations.

The concurrent functions grant attempts to redress the balance of maintenance costs of town areas (which all Borough Council Tax payers contribute to) with the cost of maintaining parish/rural areas (which only parishioners would otherwise contribute to) and is much valued.

Staplehurst Parish was fortunate to receive several grants from Living Spaces, KCC, MBC and others during the past year to enable the major refurbishment and upgrading of the play facilities at Surrenden Playing Field.

Sub-Committees

Sub committees of a Parish Council are advisory in nature and include Parish Councillors as well as members of the public with specific skills but do not have any direct financial remit. During the past year the following sub-committees were extant:

Action Plan Group – Work has continued to implement many of the issues raised in the second Village Appraisal and Action Plan adopted in 2003. A grant application has recently been made to create a Small Rural Towns Partnership to enhance business issues within the parish.

Jubilee Field Users Group – An application to the Football Foundation for funding to build new sports changing facilities and to drain the football pitches has been submitted. If funding is awarded, this much needed project will then be able to be progressed.

Village Design Statement – Following work done in conjunction with the Staplehurst Society over the past year, the final document is now in draft form. Final checks are being made before adoption and publication.

Village Update – Quarterly updates of the achievements and progress within the parish council work have been published and distributed to every household during the past year. This has been well-received and feedback is appreciated by the Parish Council. This publication is now firmly established within the council's timetable.

Website – First created in 1999 this continues to provide internet users with background and up to date information of parish council affairs. The Village Forum page is well-used and a very useful tool for all; parish and world-wide. The Website committee meets on a regular basis to monitor and improve upon the contents of the website.



Parish Clerk



The duties of a Parish Clerk are extremely varied but generally include full responsibility for the administration of the Parish Council's affairs, attending all meetings of the Council, recording the minutes, keeping minute books and records, handling the council's finances, book keeping, accounts and projects. As Staplehurst has a Parish Office open to the public and website to maintain, the Parish Clerk's role also encompasses a good deal of customer liaison and computer skills.

The activity of the Parish Council and volume of work created by all levels of Government have been increasing dramatically over the nine years that the present Parish Clerk, Mrs Sue Bassett, has been in post. Currently working nearly full-time it has been necessary to increase the Assistant Clerk's hours to share the increasing workload.

Recent government legislation covering Codes of Conduct, Register of Interests and Quality Parish Status have all played their part in raising the standards of Parish Councils generally, but this has impacted considerably upon the administrative work load at Parish level.

Assistant Parish Clerk



Mrs Sue Lynch joined the Parish Council staff in November 2004 and works four mornings a week, replacing Mrs. Sally Patient who had given notice to move on. Although appropriately qualified and thoroughly enjoying her new role, Sue Lynch has been on a steep parish council learning curve. She recently commented that she's never known a job that has so many demands and requires such breadth and depth of skills. Working for a Parish Council is not for the faint hearted.

Parish Facilities & Projects

Surrenden Playing Field – The upgrading of play facilities for the summer of 2004 was a big undertaking for the Parish Council. Financial support was received from the Government Living Spaces grant scheme as well as Kent County Council Rural Partnership, Maidstone Borough Council and others. Modern play facilities for under 12's, a teenage ball area with basketball hoop and football goal and linking pathways have transformed the area. Improved surfacing to Nicholson Walk and CCTV system, to be installed this year, will complete the project.

Jubilee Playing Field – The Parish Council is currently awaiting the response from the Football Association for a grant towards urgently needed drainage improvements to the football pitches and building of new changing facilities. Once funding is approved it is hoped this major project will proceed without further delay.

Street Lighting & Street furniture – The Parish Council maintains 29 parish street lights including The Village Sign. It also has responsibility for the seats, bollards and litter bins at The Parade, High Street and Bell Lane Car Park.

Churchyard and burial ground extension – The Parish Council liaises with the Parish Church regarding the maintenance of the Churchyard and contributes annually towards the cost. Preparations are well in hand to create a new extension for burials to the rear of the former Rectory, to the south of the existing (previously extended) churchyard.

Staplehurst Village Centre – A new committee was formed in February 2005 to continue running the Village Centre on a voluntary basis. Many of the new committee are very busy people and some are also Parish Councillors. Their input is much valued and keeps costs to a minimum but hire charges may need to rise in order to keep pace with large increases in energy charges.



Parish Facilities & Projects

Staplehurst Youth Club – A small number of volunteers run the Youth Club on Tuesday evenings for 11+ youngsters to enjoy a range of activities in this purpose-built hall. More adult volunteers would enable the Club to open additional evenings per week. To keep a greater number of young people off the streets and more positively engaged than is at present possible, contact the Parish Office to volunteer your help or visit the Club on Tuesday evenings 7.30-9pm.

Staplehurst Skaters – A large group of young teenagers with parental support are desperately trying to get a skatepark project funded. The Parish Council is doing its best to support their aims and has agreed in principle that an area of the Jubilee Playing Field could be used as a site. Research, planning, consultation and costing work has been done over the past year. A bid has been made to the Young People's Big Lottery Fund, but the first application requires improvement if it is to succeed. Such project funding bids take a great deal of time and dedication to get right but the skaters remain hopeful that success will be achieved soon.

Martyrs' Memorial – No parishioner can fail to notice how clean is the Martyrs' Memorial standing at the Marden/Headcorn Crossroads. The memorial was placed there 100 years ago and a group of volunteers cleaned, tidied and repainted the railings to acknowledge the centenary. The interesting history behind this memorial was thoroughly researched by Mr. Ron Hegarty and reported upon in the local press earlier this year. Unfortunately the idea to hold a centenary service did not ultimately take place. Due to the steadfast views of The Protestant Alliance, which were at odds with the more inclusive and ecumenical opinions of local people, it was decided to abandon a public ceremony.

Bert and Betty Seth Bench – In memory of a much respected couple who did so much for Staplehurst and former Parish Councillor, a Memorial Seat was installed on Church Hill outside Crown Cottages this year. The special design of the seat would have appealed to Bert's unique sense of humour.

Local Partnerships

Kent County Council – 08458 247 247 is the number for all telephone enquiries 24/7. Contact can also be made through their website at www.kent.gov.uk or email to county.hall@kent.gov.uk if you are unsure who to contact. Postal address is Kent County Council, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone, Kent. ME14 1XQ

Kent Highways - The new Kent Highways Service Hotline is 0845 8247 800 and is open 24/7 to take your reports of any defects within the local highways network. The Parish Council regularly liaises with Kent Highway Engineers to ensure that defects are repaired as soon as possible.

Maidstone Borough Council – 01622 602000 is the main MBC switchboard for all daytime telephone enquiries. 01622 212700 is the emergencies out of hours number. Minicom is available on 01622 602224. To report any abandoned vehicles, fly tipping or other cleansing issues, telephone 01622 602162 to report the defect for action. The Parish Council, through Borough Councillors Eric Hotson & Richard Lusty, works closely with Maidstone Borough Council to ensure this parish receives its fair share of borough services.

Community Police – Close liaison amongst the Parish Council, PC Tim Stanley, Community Warden, and Parish Special Constable takes place throughout the year. Reports of police activity and criminal incidents are given at Full Council meetings. Council and Police surgeries are held at Staplehurst Library on the last Saturdays monthly 10am-Noon for local people to air their concerns.

Neighbourhood Watch – Please contact Community Warden Chris Lomax for details 07811 271254.

Village Voluntary Groups – Many and varied interest groups exist in Staplehurst. Contact the Parish Office 01580 891761 for a list of up to date contact details.



Council Members

at 31st March 2005

MARGARET ARGER - Chairman (ex-officio members) Ex. dir.
BARRY FRANKS - Vice Chairman (of all committees.) Tel: 891514
WENDY GREEN - Chairman Planning Committee Tel: 891607
TREVOR MARTIN - Chairman Amenities Committee Tel: 892033
JOAN BULLER - Planning & Finance Tel: 892746
PAUL BUTCHER - Planning & Amenities Ex. dir.
PAUL KELLY - Planning Tel: 892700
ANGELA KNOWLDEN - Planning & Amenities Tel: 890639
JOHN REARDON - Planning & Amenities Mob: 07802 231692
CHRISTOPHER ROGERS - Planning & Amenities Tel: 892258
JOHN STEWART - Planning Tel: 892982
DONALD WOOD - Planning Ex. dir.
ROGER MUNN - Amenities Tel: 891861
LIN PLANT - Amenities Tel: 893155
JOHN SWANNICK - Finance Tel: 890750

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Member of Parliament ANN WIDDECOMBE Tel: 01622 769898
Kent County Councillor ERIC HOTSON Tel: 892312
Maidstone Borough Councillor ERIC HOTSON Tel: 892312
Maidstone Borough Councillor RICHARD LUSTY Tel: 891353

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Community Police PC TIM STANLEY Tel: 01622 690690
Parish Warden CHRISTOPHER LOMAX Tel: 07811 271254
Special Parish Constable KEN BAKER Ex. dir.

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Parish Clerk Mrs J SUSAN BASSETT 01580 891761
Assistant Parish Clerk Mrs SUE LYNCH 01580 891761

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Parish website: www.staplehurstvillage.org.uk



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