

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING OF STAPLEHURST
held in the North Hall, Staplehurst Village Centre on
Monday 23rd April 2012

PRESENT - Sixteen residents signed the attendance list together with fourteen Parish Councillors, County & Borough Councillor Eric Hotson, Borough Councillor Richard Lusty, Charlotte Osborne-Forde (Voluntary Action Maidstone), Sergeant Dave Liffen, Parish Clerk, Sue Bassett and Parish Clerk designate Mick Westwood.

APOLOGIES – Resident Robin Oakley, Community Warden Mira Martin and PCSO Pete Gardner.

VOLUNTARY ACTION MAIDSTONE – The Chairman welcomed Charlotte Osborne-Forde, CEO of Voluntary Action Maidstone (VAM). Ms Osborne-Forde gave a very interesting presentation on VAM's work. Based in Maidstone town centre, it is an umbrella organisation that funds projects and services across the whole borough and beyond. There is a particular focus on rural areas for some of its work and a new member of staff is to be based in Staplehurst at Youth Club. Volunteers launched VAM in 1975 as Maidstone Volunteer Bureau, matching people with needs in the community to volunteers. VAM now recruits 700 volunteers per year and supports 150 organisations working in Maidstone, from small community groups with no paid staff to larger ones such as Age UK. There are around 200 opportunities to get involved, including gardening, decorating, clearing wildlife reserve, fund-raising and acting as a trustee. Unemployed people can do voluntary work to build skills and also retired persons can use their skills, for the benefit of themselves as well as others. VAM volunteers also work with ex-offenders to help rebuild their self-esteem and confidence and young people can also be helped to find volunteer opportunities. Much work through email and internet enables a variety of contacts. The Council for Voluntary Service is designed to help other charities and community groups to grow and develop. It helps organisations with advice on how to register with the Charity Commission, on recruitment and on development advice. There is no charge for this and the community and capacity are growing. It also provides low cost training, newsletters and legal information. Its next conference on 1st May is to be held at Maidstone Community Support centre for anyone on a community group or trustee, delivered in partnership with Whitehead Monckton to give information on employment law, etc. Both services are funded by KCC as well as fund-raising. It can also provide funding advice in 1-1 sessions. Another project is Maidstone & Malling Carers Project – a support service for carers who are helping a person with a disability or mental health problem. Carers can sometimes have extremely challenging times and the service supports over 1,000 carers with advice and support to claim benefits, activities, respite care and support groups to give them a break from their day to day caring and meet others in similar situation. Working with GP surgeries and hospitals they can identify carers who need support. KCC supports this service as research proves that if carers are not available people will need to go into care sooner. Brighter Futures for Older People was awarded a Lottery grant for 5 years running costs. Two members of staff support 110 volunteers supporting 700 older people in rural areas. Each week they undertake telephone befriending for about 200 isolated people who have little other contact. Volunteers can call for help or befriend the elderly people, chat, take them shopping, etc. Some volunteers also work in the office. The service also runs shopping trips, takes people to the supermarket and provides a hot lunch, organises outings to the seaside, garden centre, etc. Postural stability exercise classes are run to build their strength and resilience to help prevent injuries from falls. Classes build their core strength which facilitates more rapid healing. Its activity is being extended to Staplehurst, Coxheath and Lenham. Rural outreach worker Amanda Duddell will be based in Staplehurst, working with existing village

groups. Danny Hewiss will also work with rural areas. Lottery funding enabled the purchase of a second mini-bus to enable outings. The Older Persons Forum also supports this work and brings people together to provide information on older people's services. People can hear about initiatives and have a good lunch. The next forum is in July. New services are being developed all the time. The V-Team is run by Jackie Preston, comprising a team of volunteers who have their own mental health and disability problems – these vulnerable people are given additional support and training. The V-Team helps maintain people's gardens, building maintenance, etc., no fee is charged – just materials. "Jungle clearances" – there is such a high demand for their services they cannot always do maintenance. In winter internal practical jobs are undertaken. The V-team steps in where other agencies won't help and will also move furniture if needed. Volunteers gain a lot from taking part in working as a team and supporting vulnerable and isolated people. VAM also runs a volunteer driving scheme for elderly & disabled people who cannot use public transport or afford a private taxi. It recruits volunteers who use their own cars and a central office organises bookings. Expenses are covered at 45p per mile plus office costs. 6,000 trips per year are provided, from social trips, hairdressers to hospital trips, to help people remain independent. VAM has one other small scale project called Platform for people who have used mental health services. They can come together at an open meeting to give their views on the services – to have their voices heard and socialise together free of stigma. They are also encouraged to become involved with other volunteering activities. VAM's newest project is with McMillan Cancer Support, for anyone who is receiving cancer treatment at Maidstone to provide them with emotional and practical support – sharing the experience with them; dog walking, collecting children, etc., for those who do not have friends and family around them. There is three year's funding and recruiting will begin soon. It hopes to support 40-50 people per year. VAM's ethos is whatever need there is in the community, it will try to bring people together to help one another. Strategically VAM is reaching out to rural communities. Funding is stable and secure, including National Lottery and other trusts.

Questions to Ms Osborne-Forde: How do you define an older person, as those of different ages are housebound and disabled? Is there an age limit? Answer – It depends on the service and funding. Brighter Futures 65, Older Persons Forum is 55+. In summary, it depends on the funder – 55 or 65. There can be issues around this – for older people and disabled people. Age can be irrelevant depending on the funding.

Chairman thanked Ms Osborne-Forde who then left the meeting.

MINUTES OF THE 2011 ANNUAL PARISH MEETING – These had been circulated and were taken as read. Approval of the Minutes was agreed unanimously by the meeting then signed as a true record by the Chairman of the Parish Council, John Perry. There were no matters arising.

STAPLEHURST PARISH COUNCIL FINANCIAL STATEMENT – Copies of the (unadopted) Statement of Accounts had been circulated and were noted. Cash assets totalled £99,662.41 which was divided into ear-marked reserves in the following sums:- General Fund £26,222.54, Allotments £20,000, Surrenden Playing Field £14,200, Detached Youth Project £6,250, Rural Settlement Group £3,525, Public Toilets Project £10,660, Donation towards 2012 project £1,000, Village Centre Contingency £16,804.87 and Rural Warden Winter Project £1,000. There were no questions raised.

GYBBONS CHARITY ACCOUNT – The balance at 31.12.2011 stood at £3,111.19. Income received during the previous year from War Stock and Interest totalled £19.57 and a capital sum of £100 was received. No expenditure was incurred.

ANNUAL REPORTS:-

Staplehurst Parish Council Chairman – Chairman John Perry spoke on a very active year in his report which was subsequently filed herewith and published on the Parish Council website. Following the May 2011 elections he highlighted and endorsed the Parish Council's pro-active approach to issues and services.

Borough Councillor Richard Lusty – Councillor Lusty thanked electors for returning him as Councillor and is responsible to all people in the borough to ensure Maidstone operates correctly. He works within three committees as Chairman of Planning, Employment and Development and the new Star Chamber. He is involved in Core Strategy which is going to go forward, housing, transport and lots of issues. This year he has been to Westminster twice to talk about the Localism Bill and heard the message from there that people should be very careful about the local plan lest it be hijacked by those with their own agenda. Councillor Lusty said that every single person has the right to comment on local plans but the Borough has been slow in dealing with them. The Borough is having to increase resources as it must help communities to ensure local plan is correct. A problem with Core Strategy is the allocation of gypsy sites and number of applications to set the sites within the community. The Maplehurst application was deferred as there was concern at how it was presented. Gypsy and traveller sites should fit in well with the community but families now expect to have their children settle on the same site. The Star Chamber was created three years ago to iron out concern about problems before they go to cabinet. Employment & Development allows Councillor Lusty to appraise the CEO twice a year. He stated that he sees his library surgery as an opportunity to talk about people and there are some very serious problems, including neighbourhood disputes, this year we have had a shooting in Staplehurst, parking problems are becoming serious. There are skips and planning problems – often people do not understand what they need to do in the first place. Some people keep saying we need a bypass but the cost at £10M is prohibitive. Councillor Lusty then spoke of one great success then two sad issues. The success arose when several people asked what could be done about the Doctor's surgery and the fence. Councillor Lusty received no response from the Practice Manager so escalated the issue to the Managing Director and within three weeks the fence was repaired. Sadly, he had a report that a dead horse (a foal) had been thrown in a ditch; the community officer was excellent and managed eventually to get rid of it. This was the second such occurrence this year; five 5 horses have been dumped in the Borough. Councillor Lusty is working on the case of a gentleman living in a garden shed in someone's property, trying to find accommodation for him and liaising with Helen Grant. Finally Councillor Lusty recorded thanks to Councillors Butcher and Paul Kelly and Chairman Perry.

County & Borough Councillor Hotson – Councillor Hotson thanked Chairman for the invitation to the meeting and stated how fascinating it was to listen to VAM, an incredible organisation bringing benefits to the village. He had helped in a small way through negotiation over short-term letting of Town Hall premises. He seconded Chairman's words about the helpfulness of staff, not just to Borough and Parish Councillors but also the community and recorded thanks to the retiring clerk and welcome to the new one. A key issue this year was grant funding by Borough to Parishes and on behalf of cabinet member, Councillor Hotson thanked the Parish Council Chairman for his pragmatic and logical lead on this process. Councillor Hotson also thanked the hard-working Councillor Paul Kelly, particularly remarking how clean the High Street was and how he was working with the Borough Council. Maidstone Borough Council entered into a Mid-Kent Improvement Partnership with Ashford, Tunbridge Wells and Swale to save money and improve performance. The MKIP shares licensing duties and benefits. A tripartite cabinet meeting recently worked on the next

shared service of ICT, providing a service differently, better run and with savings of £3.7M minimum over 10 years. Another shared service will be signed between KCC, MBC and Ashford Borough Council on waste collection to save even more money over the life of the contract. If income and grant aid are being reduced life is going to be different. In respect of local events, out of all the cuts made by KCC devolved budgets have not been reduced. County Councillors have £25,000 to spend on highway improvements/schemes plus £10,000 for community projects. Marden Road scheme for £12,000 is about to begin for the extension of the lighting to extend the speed limit further into Marden Road and a new surfacing/gateway feature. Councillor Hotson said he awaited advice from the Parish Council Vice Chairman regarding which signs need to be funded; the Parish Council will advise him following decision. He has assisted other village initiatives: the Winter Warmer Project with £1,000; Uprockin (a future major day in the village) £500; Queen's Diamond Jubilee celebrations £500; Youth Club £500 for cooking equipment; installation of two salt bins and refills, pedestrian guard rails at Market Street to prevent footway parking; library £180 for a new seat. Councillor Hotson then turned to County Council matters - when the current government took over there was a trillion pounds deficit, which is affecting County, Borough and Parish. The annual KCC budget is £2 billion, MBC is £18M. Government grant was reduced by 10% last year and will fall in successive years, meaning cuts while income levels have gone down. The need to run social services increases even with organisations such as VAM. The cost of highways goes up. There are no cuts yet planned for libraries and Youth Services will work differently. KCC voted for 0% increase in Council tax last year, but this year he was concerned that not putting up the Council tax would have a detrimental effect. Savings have been found but more need to be found. It has been sad to lose staff, with 3,000 gone, and it is difficult to retain services. Kent is now working with Essex, East and West Sussex on major regeneration projects. Finally, Councillor Hotson remarked that Councillors do their best but cannot always get it right. He welcomed the presence of a young Parish Councillor Lain and expressed his regret at losing the services of Councillor John Kelly. Chairman thanked EH for his support of Uprockin – a major event for Staplehurst.

Police – Sgt Dave Liffen addressed the meeting and conveyed PCSO Gardner's regrets that he could not be present. Sgt Liffen is based at Maidstone Police Station. Although there have been many changes within Kent Police, including moves and cut backs, Sgt Liffen hoped that PCSO Gardner's presence in the village gave a good level of service to the village. It was pleasing to see the number of actions achieved in the report listed in the bullet points. More should be seen of PC Marc Pennicott in future as he has joined Sgt Liffen's team. An operation run in partnership with the Home Office relating to scrap metal thefts has been successful. CCTV has been helpful in monitoring car crashes at The Parade. There were only 3 crimes in the last month's report. Questions? Councillor Paul Kelly asked whether the Parade camera could help track those responsible for knocking down bollards – they can. Paul Butcher asked about problems with the clampers, now that the company has gone into receivership, whether all the signs are now unenforceable? There is a new limited company involved and reports have been received of complainants frog-marched to the cash machine. The signs are not easy to see and can affect trade. Sgt Liffen advised that the police get involved when criminal damage occurs. He will look into the signs and liaise with PCSO Gardner. Councillor Hotson expressed shock about drugs in the village and asked whether it was a big problem as far as Staplehurst was concerned and if the police had got to grips with it. Sgt Liffen answered that it was not a big problem in Staplehurst and that the police were on top of it. Councillor Butcher advised that he has been working with Paul Richardson and has Kenward Trust coming into the village to work with the Youth. Sgt Liffen stated that PCSO Gardner's way of working is intelligence-led. Resident Ron Ribbens asked what happens to lost property that is handed in. Sgt Liffen advised that it is held for

a year then the person who handed it in is able to claim it. A resident asked whether cameras could be moved to different positions as there is a severe problem at Market Street, particularly the corner of Winches Garth/Market Street. Teenagers are being aggressive. Sgt Liffen will liaise with PCSO Gardner about the problem and the Chairman agreed to follow this up. The Chairman thanked Sgt Liffen for his contribution.

Voluntary Organisations – Staplehurst Calendar: Ken Collins advised that the 2012 calendar sold 373 copies, raised £1,638 divided between All Saints, United Reformed Church and Free Church. This was the 8th Edition and so far calendars have raised for local charities £11,327. The 2013 edition is under way.

ELECTORS' QUESTIONS

A question was raised about a post on the Village Forum relating to silver boxes and a traffic survey on Marden Road and whether this was connected with possible building of 300 houses. The Chairman has heard nothing official through parish channels. Councillor Reardon believed it to be a borough-wide survey, not just for local development.

Councillor Kelly asked whether dog bins are to continue through Borough. Councillors Hotson and Lusty said they were unaware of any edict. The Cabinet member considered it before budget-making last year. There are likely to be some cuts but dog-waste can now be disposed of in normal bins. Councillors Hotson and Lusty will try to get an answer to Councillor Kelly.

Councillor Hotson added comments on two further items. KCC investments in Icelandic Banks were being recovered: of £50M, £30M has now been received on top of the already banked £9M. He is assured by finance team that the remaining £11M plus interest will be returned in next 18 months. Finally, Councillors Hotson and Lusty highlighted that Localism will affect parishes in some areas soon, particularly the right to buy and right to challenge where members of the community can say to the Borough or County that they can do a better job. These rights will soon be expressed in written form.

Councillor Lusty opined that developers are speculating - until sites come forward in September developers are wasting their time and raising people's hopes and concerns about extra housing that may or may not come to the community. It would be better to wait for sites to come forward. Proposed housing numbers remain at 10,080 up to 2026. Councillor Lusty had fought hard to have the target reduced, but advised that if the supermarket comes to the village then the pressure to increase the number of houses will be greater. He said that parish plans and wishes must fit with the MBC Core Strategy. Co-operation will be needed to ensure the right result. The Chairman confirmed his wish to work with Borough and County Councillors.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Councillor Buller added her personal thanks to Sue Bassett for her co-operation and hard work as Parish Clerk.

The meeting closed at 9.45 p.m. and refreshments followed.

Chairman.....