

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING OF STAPLEHURST
held in the South Hall, Staplehurst Village Centre at
8.00pm on Monday 11th May 2015

PRESENT – Eleven residents signed the attendance list. Also attending were nine Parish Councillors, County Councillor Eric Hotson, Borough & Parish Councillor John Perry, Borough Councillor Louise Brice, Community Warden Mira Martin, PC Kim White OBE (Gypsy Roma Traveller Police Liaison Team), Steve Grantham (Beginners 2 Runners), Assistant Clerk Deborah Jenkins and Parish Clerk Mick Westwood.

APOLOGIES – Parish Councillors Margaret Ashby and Paul Butcher; former Borough Councillor Paulina Watson; Mr Robin Oakley; Mr David George; Mrs Mary Shaw; PCSO Pete Gardner.

PRESENTATIONS – Councillor Rory Silkin took the Chair and welcomed PC Kim White OBE from the Gypsy Roma Traveller Police Association and Mr Steve Grantham from Beginners 2 Runners. PC White described a typical life experience of a member of the Gypsy Roma Traveller community from birth, through childhood into adulthood and old age. She also described the role of the association in seeking to break down barriers between communities. PC White invited people to contact her in case of need (details available from the Parish Office and at www.grtpa.com). Mr Grantham reported that there were six Beginners 2 Runners clubs in the area, including Staplehurst (details at www.beginners2runners.co.uk). He said the clubs welcomed people of all ages and abilities and wanted to be involved in their communities; for example, they can be the 'eyes and ears' of the village as they run around the streets. He thanked the Parish Council for its funding of hi-viz vests for the Staplehurst club. After the presentations PC White left the meeting.

MINUTES OF THE 2014 ANNUAL PARISH MEETING – These had been circulated beforehand. There being no comments, the Minutes were signed as a true record by the Chairman of the Parish Council, Rory Silkin. There were no matters arising.

STAPLEHURST PARISH COUNCIL FINANCIAL STATEMENT – Copies of the Statement of Accounts (subject to audit) had been circulated and the Statement was accepted by the meeting. Net current assets totalled £121,626.58 represented by funds and reserves in the following sums: General Fund £35,000; Allotments £10,000; Surrenden Playing Field project £17,000; balance of underspent sums carried forward £46,215.18; plus reserves held on behalf of others totalling £13,411.40. In response to a question about rental costs for the Parish Office it was advised that they were included in the amount for General Administration.

GYBBONS CHARITY ACCOUNT – The balance at 31.12.2014 stood at £723.26. Income received during the previous year from War Stock and Interest totalled £18.16. Donations totalling £1,250 were made.

ANNUAL REPORTS

Staplehurst Parish Council Chairman – Councillor Rory Silkin congratulated the candidates who had been successful in the recent elections, notably Helen Grant MP, Borough Councillor Louise Brice and new Parish Councillor Chris Claridge. He reported that he had taken over the chairmanship from Councillor John Perry in September 2014 and thanked Councillor Perry for his work as Chairman and for his advice. Councillor Silkin discussed

some of the many services provided by the Parish Council, including CCTV cameras, street cleaning, public toilets, Youth Club, Play Scheme and sports facilities at Jubilee Field. He looked forward to progress on a recently initiated Parish Council project to take on a new open space by the Oliver Road development and discussed the continuing challenge of dealing with planning issues and demand for new houses. Councillor Silkin's full report was published on the village website at http://www.staplehurstvillage.org.uk/annual_parish_meetin.aspx.

Borough Councillor Perry – Councillor Perry said he had been elected to Maidstone Borough Council in May 2014 and was immediately invited to join the Cabinet with responsibility for Community and Leisure Services. He viewed the past year as challenging especially because there was a need to make up a funding shortfall caused by reduced central government support. This had led to initiatives aimed at generating income and reducing costs. Two significant issues were the emerging Local Plan and the Parish Charter. Councillor Perry explained how he had argued against allocation of 905 homes and then a further 220 homes to Staplehurst, figures which were then reduced to 650 by MBC's Cabinet. He said he could not accept a 'no growth' position for Staplehurst but felt it was essential that it be properly planned and in this respect he believed the Neighbourhood Plan was very important. Councillor Perry spoke of the benefits of the new Parish Charter, more detailed than its predecessor and setting out a clear framework for the relationship between borough and parish councils. Finally he reported that in 2015-16 MBC would be adopting a committee-based governance structure to replace the Cabinet one formerly in place.

Borough Councillor Watson – Mr Andrew Watson said that Councillor Watson had not stood for re-election to the borough council and reiterated her apologies for the meeting. He commented on the importance of the Neighbourhood Plan and of addressing the future of the Village Centre site.

County Councillor Hotson – Councillor Hotson thanked Councillor Silkin, parish councillors and the Parish Office and said that his regular liaison meetings with them were valuable. He commended the work of the Transport Accessibility Group, the Library User Group and the Village Centre Management Committee. He described how investigations had been undertaken into A229 traffic and safety issues and praised Councillor Barrett Manning for his continuing work on this. He said he was pleased to be able to support Staplehurst with some funding, including £1,000 for improved street lighting on Headcorn Road and a donation for the Carnival & Fete Committee's September celebration for the reign of Her Majesty the Queen. He advised that KCC needed to make savings and that moves towards becoming a commissioning authority were aimed at helping to achieve this. He announced that following public consultation on delivering Libraries, Registration and Archives services via a trust the project was on hold due to the need for legislative change to facilitate moving Registration. In the meantime he said it was important for county councillors to work closely with users and he planned to attend the next library user group meeting.

Police – PCSO Gardner's report had been circulated previously and published on the village website. In the year to March 2015 Staplehurst maintained a low level of crime. The parish's CCTV cameras had been used to great effect. Councillor Hotson gave special thanks to Staplehurst's PCSO and Community Warden.

Reports from Local Groups – Written reports from fourteen groups had been published on the village website at http://www.staplehurstvillage.org.uk/annual_parish_meetin.aspx and were made available at the meeting. Three verbal reports were made. Community Warden Mira Martin spoke of her work with Trading Standards and on road safety with young

people; she encouraged people to use channels such as Neighbourhood Watch and the 101 phone number to report concerns and incidents. Councillor Tom Burnham reported on the activity of Churches Together in distributing service cards for Christmas and Easter and in organising the Christian Aid collection. Councillor Rory Silkin reported that the Staplehurst Patient Participation Group was joining similar groups in the UK to promote a national PPG awareness day on 12th June when events would take place in Staplehurst Health Centre.

Local Bus Issues – Councillor Peter Spearink talked about the development of the Transport Accessibility Group from its beginnings in Hawkhurst. He described problems on the number five bus service which continued to be addressed. He thanked particularly Arriva Business Manager Mr Robert Patterson, Councillor Perry, Councillor Brice, Parish Councillor Manning and Mrs Tina Jordan for their efforts to help resolve the issues. Councillor Brice said Councillor Spearink’s use of Facebook was most helpful to service users.

ELECTORS’ QUESTIONS & COMMENTS

Several questions were raised. What could be done to increase attendance at the Annual Parish Meeting? Councillor Silkin acknowledged that Staplehurst’s meeting, like that of many other parishes, was formal; he was aware of others whose format was more informal, such as a showcase evening for village groups. He invited comments from attendees, which included: issue invitations through schools to attract younger people, perhaps to a special session within the meeting; banner advertising in the village; hold a meeting on Saturday morning; parishioners are better informed through updates and website and therefore do not feel the need to attend; this year the timing was a factor as there was an element of election fatigue. What news was there about Sainsbury’s opening? The Parish Council seeks regular updates but Staplehurst is part of a bigger national picture. Councillor Perry explained that he had prepared a letter which Helen Grant MP had sent to the company. When would the Village Centre Redevelopment Group start work? The Parish Council would be appointing its representatives at its annual meeting this month and the volunteers would then be invited to an initial meeting.

The meeting closed at 9.50 p.m.

Chairman.....