

REPORTS TO ANNUAL PARISH MEETING 2011

CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT 2010-2011

This has turned to have been quite an eventful year for our Parish. The fire that took place in the High Street whilst tragic for those directly affected also helped to unite our community. Our thanks must go out to the Police, the Fire and Rescue Services, KCC and all the voluntary services involved. Lessons can always be learned and the Parish Council organised a public meeting to discuss the issues. We have also set up an Emergency Help Team. This will have important local information which could prove invaluable if similar emergencies reoccur. We also experienced a temporary closure of our only post office. In a rural community such as Staplehurst not having access to a post office is a major issue and the Parish Council was extremely active in raising this matter with the Post Office's senior management. I should like to take the opportunity to thank our M.P. Helen Grant for taking the matter up on our behalf.

The 15 member Council now meets twice a month immediately after the Planning Committee. The Council deals with a wide range of correspondence sent to the Clerk as well as issues relating to services provided by the Council. It is recognised that with the Localism Bill coming into effect provision of services by the Council is likely to become more and more important; and as a result we are currently looking at areas where the Council can make an effective contribution. Current services include street lighting, ownership of Jubilee Field and Surrenden Field (the latter on a long lease) and management of the public toilets. The latter was successfully taken over at the beginning of this financial year. We believe that this is an important community service and the Council's decision to take over the operation represents the most cost effective solution.

Councillors are involved in many areas affecting the Parish. I should like to highlight three issues that are of particular relevance. We recognise that there is a strong demand for allotments in the Parish and we have set up a group to look at all options. We also recognise that residents wish to feel secure when visiting areas of the Parish such as the Parade. So with this in mind we have set up a group to investigate various options available; this is described in greater detail below under the Alcohol Control Zone. Finally, we recognise that provision of affordable housing and future housing development in the Parish is extremely important. We have therefore set up a Rural Settlement Group comprising both parish councillors and residents to facilitate a survey of needs in the Parish and residents' opinions. This is very much an ongoing process and particular thanks go to Councillor John Kelly for facilitating the Group's work.

We also have an active finance group and that one of its functions is making recommendations to the Council in respect of the Council's budget and Precept. This year the Precept calculation for 2011/12 has been affected by two issues. The first is the taking over of the running of the public toilets. The alternative would have been closure by Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) which after discussion we felt was not an option. The second was the initial decision by MBC to reduce and eventually abolish the grant for concurrent functions. This grant is given to rural parishes in recognition of the fact that these parishes provide functions and services which are provided by MBC in town areas. The grant for 2010/11 was worth over £29000 to Staplehurst Parish Council and any significant reduction could affect the precept calculation. We therefore campaigned strongly with other rural parishes for MBC to review its proposal. This MBC has agreed to do and we look forward to working with them to achieve an outcome acceptable to all parties. Unfortunately, despite making cost savings and drawing on reserves, we have had little option but to increase the Parish Precept if current services are to be maintained. However, the increase will be less than 10p per week for a Band D property.

As many will know the current Mayor of Maidstone is Councillor Eric Hotson who is a Staplehurst resident. Our thanks are due to him as our County/Borough Councillor and to Borough Councillor Richard Lusty for the support they give to the Parish Council and to Staplehurst. Councillor Joan Buller and her husband Malcolm continue to do sterling work with Speed Watch which is an important tool in controlling speeding through the village; their work is much appreciated. We also much appreciate the work of PC Marc Pennicott, PCSO Pete Gardner and Community Warden Chris Lomax; their presence and contributions are essential to the well being of our village. Sadly we have lost three Councillors this year, Barry Franks, Angela Knowlden and Steve Smith; but, at the same time we welcomed Jim Frodsham, John Kelly and Rory Silkin to the Council and already they have made significant

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contributions to our work. We also lost Helen Warmington who resigned in order to take up full time study. We thank her for work and wish her all the very best for the future. We appointed Deborah Jenkins to take her place as Assistant to the Clerk. Deborah is currently Clerk to Frittenden Parish Council and I am sure her experience will prove very useful.

We continue to publish the 'Village Update'. This was part of the criteria needed to achieve Quality Status. We shall have the opportunity to reapply for Quality Status once we have a new Council that meets the criteria of having two thirds of its members elected. Nonetheless, whatever happens we consider the 'Village Update' to be an important tool for communicating issues to the residents of this Parish. I should like to thank Councillor Fairfax and Councillor Buller for their editing work and Councillor Paul Kelly for providing the printing services. Thanks also go to those who contribute to it and to our dedicated volunteers who deliver it.

Finally, I should like to express my thanks to all Council Members. They are all volunteers and give up their time to help improve the quality of life in our Parish and to our Clerk Sue Bassett who keeps us all on the straight and narrow. My particular thanks go to Vice-Chairman Tom Burnham for his support and to Councillor Margaret Arger our Chairman of Planning. Margaret had been our Council Chairman for the previous 7 years and her advice and support has been invaluable.

This year is an election year and in May 2011 we shall have a new Council. Parish Councils are in effect the first rung on the democratic ladder. However, the Council can only reflect the views of its parishioners if they are freely given. Clearly there are means to do this, for example the Forum, Borough Councillor Lusty's monthly surgeries or through attendance at Council committee meetings. Whatever means is chosen we need to hear from you.

Councillor John Perry - Chairman

KENT POLICE



During the previous twelve months crime levels in the Parish have remained low. This has been achieved through the support that we receive from the community and the other agencies we work with. We have dealt with a number of issues throughout the year, which have included the following:

- Nuisance football in Tomlin close. This involved letter drops and home visits to residents and youths. CCTV was also temporarily deployed in the area.
- Nuisance youths in Church Green. We deployed CCTV, sent letters to parents and carried out joint home visits with Golding Homes. We also increased patrolling in the area..
- Work with Sobell Lodge to tackle inconsiderate parking.
- Searches of two addresses were carried out and quantities of drugs were found. Persons have been arrested in relation to these offences and are awaited court hearings..
- Bike security marking carried out with various groups in the village.
- PCSO Gardner has now been trained to carry out speed monitoring checks in the village and has been carrying out regular checks.

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- We have worked closely with shops offering crime prevention advice to reduce and detect incidents of shoplifting. We have achieved high rates of identification of suspects and convicted a number of offenders.
- There have been several convictions in the last year in relation to Burglaries carried out in the Parish.

We are continuing to work around the issues of young people drinking alcohol and causing a nuisance at The Parade. The techniques we have used to tackle this include, the deployment of the Mobile Police Station, the use of the Neighbourhood Task Team and alcohol test purchases carried out by Trading Standards. CCTV was also deployed in the area. Calls have been vastly reduced over the past 6 months.

Police surgeries have now been arranged for the forthcoming year at the library and you are all welcome to attend and raise any concerns you have.

Saturday	23 April 2011	12:00-13:00 hrs	
Saturday	28 May 2011	10:00-12:00 hrs	Joint MBC/Police
Saturday	25 June 2011	10:00-12:00 hrs	Joint MBC/Police
Saturday	30 July 2011	10:00-12:00 hrs	Joint MBC/Police
Saturday	03 September 2011	12:00-13:00 hrs	
Saturday	08 October 2011	12:00-13:00 hrs	
Saturday	19 November 2011	12:00-13:00 hrs	

Thank you for your continued support in making Staplehurst safe.

PC Marc Pennicott
PCSO Pete Gardner



KCC COMMUNITY WARDEN - Chris Lomax

In many ways the previous year has been a successful and positive time in terms of tackling Village issues such anti-social behaviour and the project work I do to help raise the quality of life for residents.

I am pleased to report that Staplehurst now has a flourishing independent Youth Club, Parish Councillor Paul Butcher, Mike King (Youth Worker) and the volunteers can be proud of the progress we are making to make it a success. We are regularly having attendances of roughly 20 young people and these are young people that I know would otherwise be 'hanging around' the village if this resource wasn't open.

Maintenance and improvements are being made to the Youth Club to make it a building which is fit for purpose and a welcoming environment. We are grateful for the support and funding we are receiving from our local Councillors Eric Hotson and Richard Lusty, Parish Council and funding organisations.

As the Police report has stated, we have been through a period of low crime and anti-social behaviour, and I am sure that part of this is due to the dedication and local knowledge of the Police team we have in Staplehurst. I have continued to support my Police colleagues with providing information and tackling low-level incidents myself where appropriate.

I have dealt with a variety of issues once again this year, these are mostly youth anti-social behaviour, litter, dog fouling and fly tipping. Complaints of parking are a constant issue, particularly at Staplehurst School where I regularly attend to help.

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Due to resident questionnaire feedback we are pursuing a course of action that includes working with local retail outlets, tackling litter and youth congregation where alcohol may be supplied to under-age people, and we have erected a camera to monitor issues at The Parade area. I have been working with Trading Standards very closely on the issue of alcohol related sales, behaviour and littering. I am pleased to report that the Parish Council is supporting this project and has a very positive role. We are assessing the viability of an alcohol control zone.

Age Concern is using Staplehurst as its flagship Community Hub project. I am helping the project coordinator with this and I am convinced that this will improve the quality of life for many older residents. I am particularly pleased at the high level of help and support local residents are willing to provide to make this a success. I am hoping that the work I do to help vulnerable older residents will be included in the projects set up by the Community Hub project.

The local Police team and I work closely with Staplehurst Neighbourhood Watch, we attend their meetings and provide information where necessary, and act on information we receive from them. Staplehurst now has a very active Neighbourhood Watch scheme, with dedicated and enthusiastic volunteers who no doubt provide support to residents, and help to make the village a nicer and safer place to live.

I would like to thank Staplehurst Parish Council for their support in the work I and the Police team do, and I look forward to 2011 being a positive year for Staplehurst.

PARISH PUBLICITY AND WEBSITE GROUP

This group looks at all areas of communication between the Parish Council and the people of the village. This group has been made up of Councillors Reardon, Buller, Burnham, Fairfax, John Kelly, Frodsham and Best with additional help from David Henley of Zulogic. The group is focused into two main areas, the operation of the website to disseminate information and the production of printed materials such as the Village Update and Annual Report. Each quarter 2,500 copies of the Village Update are produced and delivered to every letter box in the village.

During the previous 12 months the group has produced four editions of the Village Update. The Village Update is not intended as a newspaper, but is a publication to inform everyone in the village about the business of the Parish Council.

The website has continued to expand both as a depository of Council meeting minutes, notes from subgroups and for reports by Councillors made when visiting other local organizations.

For those interested in the website statistics, in the last year the website had 105,000 hits with on average 2,500 individual visits each month and over half-a-billion pages viewed. The most popular destination on the website is the forum making up about one-third of all visits.

The group has been working on new developments for the website including a re-styled and improved forum, a new all inclusive photo gallery and a new home page to contain more up-to-date news and notices of village events.

STAPLEHURST RURAL SETTLEMENT GROUP (SRSG)

A Rural Service Centre Workshop for Core Strategy, facilitated by Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) took place on 25th November 2009 involving 6 villages including Staplehurst.

Following the Workshop, it was agreed to form the **Staplehurst Rural Settlement Group (SRSG)** which has been active since early 2010. The SRSG is a mixed group of residents and parish councillors, reporting directly to Staplehurst Parish Council (Parish Council).

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The SRSG's initial remit was to monitor developments around the **Local Development Framework (LDF)**. However delays in the development of the LDF led to the SRSG having a wider remit.

The SRSG worked closely with Action with Communities in Rural Kent (ACRK) and Maidstone Borough Council throughout 2010, to successfully publish the **Housing Survey** in February 2011. The Survey consisting of 2 parts, highlighted views and suggestions around infrastructure and affordable housing provision. The Survey has filled a 'gap' in the Parish Councils knowledge base and will influence any future housing development in Staplehurst.

The SRSG also started work on a **Development Contributions Document** which will outline the possible use of any developers financial 'Contributions', resulting from future development within Staplehurst Village. The mechanism should secure the planning gains which may be offered by Developers or requested by the Local Planning Authority.

In February 2011 the Parish Council asked for the SRSG to begin work on the formation of a **Parish Plan**. Initial work has started and again we will be working closely with ACRK to lay out a plan consistent with the future Localism Bill.

The SRSG continues to monitor developments on the LDF and will seek to be at the forefront of planned local public consultation, starting in June, 2011 and beyond.

Councillor John Kelly

SPEED WATCH

Volunteers have been out and about at some of our nine sites in Staplehurst with the Speed Watch equipment throughout the year. With the lowered speed thresholds from March 2009 we expected a higher number of recorded speeders on our roads.

For this year from April '09 to March '10, 13 volunteers (one having been newly trained) have deployed in teams of three on 17 occasions recording the registration numbers of 118 vehicles. Four cars were seen at 45mph or above in the 30mph areas. Registered owners were sent a very firm Police letter and PC Pennicott informed of their details. Another two vehicles received a warning letter as they had been recorded for a second time within a twelve month period. Our two, two-hour sessions near The Quarter yielded just two vehicles recorded at 47 and 48mph, proving that our visible jackets make the drivers realise that they should check their speed when entering Staplehurst.

All members of our scheme receive regular newsletters about our parish and the Mid-Kent Area. Anyone interested in Speed Watch training should contact the Parish Office. With the changes to police working areas and personnel that are inevitable a policy review is taking place and changes to the scheme will be made in 2011. One already in force is the reduction to two volunteers required to make a team. In theory this should make it easier to deploy more often, but in practice it is the team leaders who are needed to organise one or two others. To aid this we are using "all-out days", hoping to get as many volunteers as possible involved and make a real impact on the driving population using our roads.

The network of parishes investing time and money in the scheme is steadily growing. The majority of drivers in Staplehurst are keeping to the speed limits, which is encouraging as this is the prime purpose of Speed Watch. We hope that all parishioners will set a good example and help slow down the speed of the inconsiderate, dangerous minority.

Joan Buller ,Parish Speed Watch Liaison Councillor

STAPLEHURST CALENDAR 2011

Sales of the 2011 (7th Edition) Staplehurst Calendar are now complete. This year a combined Staplehurst/Weald Deanery Calendar was produced. Thanks to the generosity of the thirteen Staplehurst business advertisers, sponsors and those who bought calendars the total raised was

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£1,382.00. This was divided equally between the two named charities - Leonard Cheshire Disability and The Weald Club for the Disabled. Thanks are also due to the businesses and shops who sold calendars, with special thanks to Martins Newsagents and The Post Office. Over the past 7 years more than £10,000 has been raised for local charities and organisations. Production of the 8th Calendar is now underway with a new local theme - details to be announced later.

Ken Collins

CARNIVAL & FETE

Again 2010 was a very good year for us. The event at the end of June 2010 was very popular, as in previous years and the Committee made enough profit to provide 5 requests for donations to village organisations/individuals and, also to provide Christmas entertainment at the Village Centre in November. Hopefully, with the continued support of village businesses we will be able to repeat the success this year. Following the Fete on Saturday 25th June, Sunday morning we will host a 10k road race sponsored by Plumb-bay, a local business situated in Lodge Road. This will create more funds to be distributed back to village causes. At this stage we would like to thank all the businesses that sponsored us during the past 12 months and the Parish Council for their continued support of this annual village event. As with all organisations we are always happy to receive help on the day. If anyone would like to volunteer please contact Jenny Wilden 01580 892764, Elaine Downton 01580 893586 or Diane Rowden 01580 891889, Secretary Staplehurst Carnival & Fete Committee.

COMMUNITY CENTRE FOR DEBT ADVICE

The debt advice centre has now been open and giving advice to members of the public for 2 years. We use one of the upstairs rooms in the Village Centre as our permanent office base and then use the other upstairs rooms as and when required. When the centre first opened we had 18 newly trained volunteers. Since then some people have ended their involvement due to family circumstances and other commitments and we have trained one new volunteer. We now function well with just 11 active advisors.

During the last 2 years we have given budgeting advice and support to a number of people as well as negotiating affordable payment plans for clients who are struggling to pay their creditors. These actions can have a profound effect on the state of mind of the individual. Some of our clients come from Staplehurst, others from the South Maidstone area. The total debt owed by the clients we have helped is in excess of £200,000. Our approach is a 'hands on' one and so we continue to support our clients even when they are settled in making regular, reduced payments to their creditors. During 2010 we were busy with new clients during the first half of the year. This was followed by a quiet period during the autumn and, picked up again over Christmas. During quiet periods we take the opportunity to review ongoing client's situations and to put out more advertising and publicity.

As is the situation with many voluntary organisation in the current economic client, funding proves to be an issue. We receive regular support from the Free Church as well as occasional donations from the Parish Council, Carnival Committee and other churches. We have been very grateful for all donations – particularly those that come from a team of regular quiz winners at The Bell. We are continually looking for new sources of funding to pay our bills. We do not wish to be a Debt Advice Centre that is in debt. Despite some financial headaches it seems right to continue to offer this free service as our community become more affected by cut-backs, job losses and the associated financial difficulties.

FRIENDS OF STAPLEHURST HEALTH CENTRE

During the year 2010-2011 The Friends have continued to work to assist the staff and patients of the Health Centre. They have purchased four pulse oxymeters, a set of baby weighing scales, a digital spirometer and reference books for the practice nurses. Four newsletters have been produced which have been circulated with the Parish Council's Village Update. Health information evenings have been

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held on Glaucoma, Dementia, Chiropractic and the Anthony Nolan Trust. The Christmas draw has been run as usual and a decorated Christmas tree has been provided to give the waiting area a more festive appearance. The Friends continue to collect unwanted spectacles for re-cycling, with over 300 pairs being collected so far. A team of Friends have assisted with the checking in for flu jab patients when around 1000 patients were vaccinated. The Friends continue to promote and support the 'Message in a Bottle' scheme which is run by our friends, the Paddock Wood and District Lions Club. The Friends have subsidised the work of a personal stress counsellor for patients who were in desperate need of help and could not wait for similar service on the NHS, or afford to pay for private counselling.

GIRLGUIDING IN STAPLEHURST

Every unit has taken part in the celebrations for the centenary of Girl guiding UK, which culminated in a huge gathering of all Rainbows, Brownies, Guides, Rangers and Trefoil members from all over the County. They met at the showground in Detling on 20/10/2010 for a celebration ending at 20.10 hours! Every member renewed their Guiding Promise and a great evening was had by all.

In the village, Rainbows enjoyed a sleepover at the Guide Centre in April and joined in a number of Centenary events through the year including the Finale at Detling in October, where the fireworks were voted the "best bit". Our annual Rainbow Ramble took place at Frittenden and our summer term finished with football on the field. In the autumn the girls gained a new Roundabout badge and ended the term with a traditional Christmas party. Thinking Day celebrations were held in the Unit and the girls are now looking forward to the next sleepover, which is to have a "camping" theme, with the girls sleeping in tents in the hall. We have welcomed two new leaders to Rainbows this year but we nevertheless have enough girls on the waiting list to open a new unit and so would still like to hear from more prospective leaders!

At 4th Brownies we started the Centenary year with a party to celebrate our Pack's 30th birthday. We had a family fun afternoon when over 50 members of the Brownie's families and many of the Pack's original Guiders joined us. In June we visited All Saints to learn about the bells and the tower, we were all brave enough to stand on the roof and enjoy the unique view of the county.

Our Brownies thoroughly enjoyed joining the other Staplehurst Brownies at the Imagine Play centre for a sleepover. During the summer holidays we spent a day exploring Brattle Farm and its fields, the Brownies were excited to make their own flour from grain they found left in the fields. We also held a craft day. The Brownies love 'making and baking', The Trefoil Guild came to make Christmas crafts with us and we have made pizzas, pancakes, fairy cakes, fortune cookies, salsa, various biscuits and fudge.

Paul Brooker helped the Brownies gain their Basic First Aid Badges and will be returning to help them earn their Advanced Badges. The Brownies took part in a sponsored help at home to raise money for Children with leukaemia. We were once again honoured to make a Posy for Remembrance Sunday; each member of our unit makes a Poppy, which are joined together, then laid at The War Memorial.

At 3rd Brownies we attended many organised Centenary events during the year. In January 2010 some of us attended a Brownie sleepover at Butlins in Bognor Regis along with over 4,000 other Brownies. The weekend was spent enjoying the different activities and shows available. In October we joined 2000 others from the County to celebrate the end of the centenary year at the Detling Showground, we looked back at the past year, the evening finished with a magnificent firework display. We have worked as a pack and gained many badges during the year, Number Fun, Brownie Skills and World Guiding along with the special Adventure 100 badge which challenged us to numerous activities. One special evening we had was a cold night when we learnt how to keep warm and saw how many layers of clothing could be worn by one person, 27 layers springs to mind!! and we finished off with hot chocolate and marshmallows. Another time we made the shape 100 out of various items pens, pencils, coins, beads and even ourselves. 3 of the older brownies took over one of the meetings and ran it entirely themselves, they organised an obstacle

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course, a colouring competition as well as games to play. It is not only the girls who have the opportunity to gain badges, Lemur this year has gained her overnight licence and has now become one of the few brownie Guiders in the County to gain her Brownie camp licence. September was a very big month for us; we became the first Brownie Pack from Staplehurst to go camping. We had a fabulous weekend away sleeping in tents, cooking on open fires, exploring woodlands and singing round the biggest campfire ever seen, so much so that we are planning to go away again this year which is only possible thanks to the leaders and other adults who offer to come away with us. The beginning of this year we have been travelling around the world visiting various countries that the girls have chosen. We have travelled nearly 40,000 miles by Brownie plane visiting Egypt, Hawaii, Japan, Wales and India. Activities have included making pyramids out of spaghetti and marshmallows, turning some brownies into Mummies, sipping homemade cocktails on the beach!! learning the art of origami and ikebana, making a card showing a welsh lovespoon with our own message on it and sitting down together and enjoying an Indian meal. For our special thinking day meeting we dressed in costumes from around the world and lit candles to remind us of the brownies from all the different counties we had visited.

1st Staplehurst Guides have had a lot of new joins this year and currently have 18 girls who attend regularly. We have worked as a unit on several badges including Agility, Cook and Craft and lots of the girls have completed their first year's challenge badge. As part of the centenary celebrations we worked on Adventure 100 challenge and many of the girls enjoyed the fireworks at Detling in October 2010. Leader Tanya gained her overnight licence and we had a Guide sleepover in the hall. This May, we are attending the Go for the World camp at Blacklands.

Friday Guides had several themed evenings, a race night, made and decorated candles, learnt line dancing and cheerleading, they held a Christmas Bazaar, and went on an outing to Hyde Park to the Winter Wonderland.

Staplehurst Rangers was formed last May from the Senior Guides of Wednesday, 1st Guides. We are now 9 Rangers and 2 Guiders - Pauline Roots and Mel Alesi, who took over from Liz Lamb. The Unit has cooked (a lot), made cards and jewellery, and sold Carnival programs. Activities away from the Centre include a sleep out under the stars, 10 pin bowling, crazy golf, visit to Cranbrook Observatory and visit to Cranbrook Fire Station - highlight of this was using the hose and sitting in the cab of the engine! We have celebrated Christmas, St Patrick's Day, and Chinese New Year. Guiding Celebrations include Thinking Day, the Finale of the Centenary of Guiding at Detling and meeting other Rangers in our County for a games night. We visit the Pestalozzi village this March and a trip to London is also planned. Lydia Warmington went on an International Trip to God's Golden Acre in S Africa, which has changed her life. Our flag was paraded on St Georges Day and Remembrance Day. We meet Wednesdays of term time at the Guide Centre from 7-8.30, all girls and young women aged 14-26 are welcome.

Trefoil Guild continues to grow in numbers. We now have a regular attendance of 36+, who have guest speakers and activities both in the village and other places. For example they went pottery painting in Maidstone which was so popular they plan to go again in May! They recently organised a craft day for Trefoil members from all over the area and 50 ladies (plus 1 brave man!) came for a day to make daffodil bags, fir cone decorations, jewellery, and many other things.

As you can see, Girl guiding is very active in this area, but like other voluntary organisations is suffering from lack of volunteers. If anyone is interested ring Sally 892424 or staplehurstguidingpr@yahoo.co.uk

STAPLEHURST INTEREST GROUP

STAPLEHURST INTEREST GROUP has now been meeting for a programme of activities chosen by the members for nine years. We meet in the Schoolroom behind the United Reformed Church every Thursday morning from 10 until noon. We enjoy a varied diet of speakers, games, participation activities and occasional trips out. We aim to ensure everyone laughs a lot, makes new friends and

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widens their interests. We have a group of regulars who come every week and a lot of members who come whenever they can. It may, of course, be for the refreshments and chat. If **YOU** have a desire to talk to our group about anything that interests you, you would be guaranteed a welcome from STAPLEHURST INTEREST GROUP.

Joan and Malcolm Buller

STAPLEHURST FREE CHURCH

Having received the awaited good news that the planning permission re-applied for had been granted, our building committee set to in earnest to see how they might be able to develop those plans into a workable and financially achievable project. It was most encouraging to hear from them at the beginning of the New Year that we could now go forward in March this year to actually begin putting down the foundations with a view to completing a water tight shell of the new building later in the year.

A special "Groundbreaking event was scheduled for March 5th which would be attended by the Mayor, Councillor Eric Hotson, our Maidstone and Weald MP, Helen Grant, our Parish Councillor Richard Lusty and a variety of other VIPs as well as members and friends of the Church. This was arranged as with gratitude to God we acknowledged His blessing in enabling us to come this far. For us it is amazing that we are now able to see a long awaited vision become a reality and many in the community are encouraging us along in this project.

Of course we are most grateful to the local school in their willingness to let us continue to use their hall for our morning services and a variety of evening events which have included a social dance evening with Jack Davidson and friends, a barn dance and a carol service at which the school choir and their families participated.

We also are grateful to the URC for the use of their premises on Sunday evenings for our services and mid-week business meetings. Their refurbished premises have been a real blessing especially as for ten weeks last summer we held a special Keshet course on Sunday evenings which included hot and cold refreshments. The Keshet course is designed to help us understand the connection between the Jewish roots of our faith and how this has affected our belief system in Christianity today.

We decided to close our fortnightly open youth club on Friday evenings held in the youth centre last autumn for due to lack of participants it seems to have served and fulfilled a useful purpose for many years, however, our church youth club held in the URC schoolroom continues on Tuesday evenings led effectively by the Weald Youth for Christ worker, Dennis Coburn. Our faithful workers in our Toddlers club celebrated ten years of service to the village during the year and still are a helpful resource to many parents and children in the community as they meet every Thursday morning in the village hall.

Working together with our fellow churches in the village we are glad to see the Debt Advice centre based in the Village Centre is helping a variety of families and our puppet ministry team "Ps'arms Puppets continues to take assemblies in about 15 schools each term in the Maidstone area. Being a church with a heart to serve our community we are pleased to be involved in a whole variety of ways encouraging one another in the caring role that helps us all feel as though we belong.

Respectfully submitted by Clive Jones.

STAPLEHURST HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY

The Society had a successful year with varied and interesting illustrated monthly talks covering a wide range of horticultural matters and outings to several gardens. We welcomed 17 new members which helped to increase our membership to nearly 100, and meetings were well attended by about half that number each month. Our Spring and Autumn shows were well attended and appreciated by the judges and the public. Despite the unhelpful weather the quality and number of entries was encouraging. The members Rose show in June produced a wide variety of blooms and perfumes. The Plant Sale in early May was a sell out and raised a good sum of money for the Society through the sale of a mixture of members grown and bought in plants. June brought the annual Staplehurst

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Carnival where our stand of interesting and different plant displays won the Best Stand in the show. Two months later we again displayed at the Staplehurst Manor Fete. In August we had an enjoyable social evening in the garden of two of our members, and were fortunate enough to avoid the downpour of rain. In October our annual Quiz evening held in the Primary School saw a large number of people have an enjoyable evening. As in previous years some of our members gave their time and advice in helping at the School Gardening club. Monthly trips were organised on weekday mornings to gardens in Kent and Sussex which gave members a chance to visit or revisit new or favourite places. We are delighted and grateful that our sponsors Rumwood Nurseries of Langley and Highgrove of Staplehurst kindly continue to support us. Despite rising costs our finances remain steady and we look forward with confidence to the coming year as a thriving and friendly society. Our Annual General Meeting takes place on the first Friday in December which is followed by cheese and wine and entertainment, and is always a fun evening. Our other meetings are held on the third Tuesday of each month in the Village Centre South Hall at 8pm and all are welcome.



STAPLEHURST NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH

We remain one of the smallest groups in the village but our dedicated membership feel we are providing useful security information to those villagers that have asked for our help. Our main activities are - liaising with Maidstone Police Neighbourhood Watch who supply us with regular updates on local crimes, suspect callers, rogue traders, phonecalls and other scams. They also feed us with details of national and regional police initiatives. This information is then passed to interested neighbours where relevant. We maintain good friendly contacts with PC Marc Pennicott, PCSO Peter Gardner and Parish Warden Chris Lomax, who attend our meetings and tell us of local security issues, when their shift patterns permit. We regularly feed local concerns to 'Consumer Direct' when members have had suspect callers seeking personal information. We 'lost' the services of our long-serving and much appreciated secretary, Mrs. Jeanette Whitford, but have a worthy and keen replacement in Mrs Rita Game. New members always welcomed - its FREE TO ALL RESIDENTS !! We next meet at the McCabe Centre on Thursday 19th May at 5.30 pm.

David Ralph, Chairman

STAPLEHURST PATIENTS' PARTICIPATION GROUP

It is necessary against the background of disquiet currently being expressed regarding health care in Staplehurst for a brief history of the PPG in the village to be outlined. It was in June 2009 that the idea was first mooted by Malling Health via the Health Centre for a Patients' Participation Group (henceforth referred to as the PPG) to be formed here, it being explained that it was NHS policy to encourage the formation of PPGs to be attached to local medical practices. Subsequent meetings resulted in the appointment of myself as Chairperson, a Secretary and the formation of a Liaison Group.

Thirty-eight organisations were circulated with 'An Introduction to the Staplehurst PPG' which defined the role it aimed to play in forming a line of communication between patients and the Health Centre, since when efforts have been concentrated on creating a dialogue between patients and the Centre encompassing the health concerns and available care of patients. The process is a steep learning curve for us, for the Health Centre management and for Malling Health. The result being aimed for is a balanced understanding between all parties of what is required and what means are available to achieve these requirements.

The qualification for membership of the Staplehurst PPG is to be a patient registered at the Health Centre, entitling the patient to attend all our meetings following which every attendee receives a copy of the Minutes detailing issues raised and how they have been dealt with. As an example the January meeting included the welfare needs of vulnerable patients, the appointment system, GP staffing, the

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Health Centre website, the pharmacy issue, mental health issues, sexual health education and counselling available for young patients together with current Health Centre news.

It is at this stage that it is relevant to point out to those residents who have been expressing disquiet about health issues in Staplehurst on the Village Forum that they should attend the PPG meetings where they would not only be informed of how particular issues are being dealt with, but they would also be able to take part in debate on these matters and raise any other concerns they may have.

It is also open to patients to write to the PPG expressing any concerns, delivering their letter in a sealed envelope to the Health Centre reception where it will be held for collection. The proviso is that the letters are not anonymous. Names and contact details should be given and would be confidential to PPG officers, unless otherwise stipulated by the sender. All concerned and interested patients are welcome to attend the next PPG meeting which is scheduled to take place on Wednesday 20th April at 7.15 pm at the Health Centre.

Jeannette D. Whitford, Chairperson



The Staplehurst Scout group continues to offer unique opportunities for boys and girls between the ages of 6 of 14. The scout group is made up of three sections, Beavers for 6-8 year olds, Cubs for 8-10¹/₂ year olds and Scouts for 10¹/₂ to 14 year olds. We have 116 children attending Scouts currently and 24 adult leaders, assistants and helpers. More details are available at <http://www.staplehurstscouts.org.uk>

The past year has seen another full programme of events with Beavers, Cubs and Scouts working towards a varied collection of badges ranging from the community badge through to the swimming badge. There have been too many visits and activities to list here but some of the highlights included ten-pin bowling, night hikes (in all weathers!), snowboarding, outdoor cooking and of course map reading, which incidentally didn't stop the scouts getting lost on their own night hike! Another aspect of the group is to have themed evenings and these have been many and varied including artwork, American life, pirates and computing. Challenges are another large part of our activities and these have included the global challenge, fitness challenge and the promise challenge. Amongst all the fun the scouts went canoeing, had a trip to the pantomime and of course all the sections have been camping in the great tradition of scouting.

Serving the community is also a large part of scouting and this year has seen a number of fund raising activities and other community projects. We have also supported charities cumulating in raising £358 for Hearing Dogs for the Deaf.

Staplehurst Scouts is totally dependent upon the subscriptions raised from parents and its own fund raising initiatives. It is self sufficient and not in receipt of any public funding or subsidies. All adult helpers are volunteers and give up of their time freely to help make scouting a fantastic experience for all the boys and girls who attend. We are always on the lookout for new helpers so if you would like to get involved in any of our sections, even on a part-time basis, please get in touch by calling 893133 anytime.

William Best - Chair, Staplehurst Scout Group.

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THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH, STAPLEHURST

The United Reformed Church in Staplehurst continues to maintain its reformed tradition and endeavours to live up to our mission statement: that *"This church exists to worship God and follow the example of Jesus."* We are always seeking new ways to reach out to the community in which we are placed. Unlike many churches in this land we are blessed with a wide age range within our fellowship.

We continue to enjoy the new remodelled sanctuary area and entrance of our building and with chairs rather than pews we are able to make better use of the space we have for a greater range of activities.

Whilst in past years we have engaged in numerous "fundraising" events to pay for the alterations to our building, these have for now, for the time being, been completed and so fundraising is no longer a prime issue. Whilst we do of course need to raise funds and we will still organize events, the focus will be on providing opportunities for our fellowship to meet and to reach out to our community. To this end, at the beginning of the year, we decided to explore a different way of doing "church" and have been running "Messy Church" on the first Saturday afternoon each month, other than during holiday periods. This has proved very successful and has enabled families who would not normally think of coming to church, to meet, play games with their children, do craft work, engage in simple worship and have a meal together.

During the year our minister the Revd. Andrew Mills had the opportunity of having time away from his normal duties for a well earned sabbatical. During his time away we were privileged to have a variety of people leading our worship including friends from the Free Church and from the Parish Church.

In the summer last year we had the pleasure of playing host to members of L'Arche Lambeth Community on their pilgrimage to Canterbury, providing them with meals and a place to sleep overnight and at the same time sharing in their devotions and worship. It was for us a very humbling experience.

Along with the other churches in the village we endeavour to work together when at all possible and with "Churches Together in Staplehurst" we meet regularly to plan occasions and projects that all churches can engage in. At present Staplehurst churches are looking at what they might do together in 2012, the year of the Olympics.

Stafford Cannam – Church Secretary

WEALD CLUB FOR THE DISABLED (reg.charity No 1096635)

The Club continues to flourish with weekly Friday meetings, held at The McCabe Centre, Staplehurst. Up to 20 Members enjoy a cooked lunch, and entertainment, which include Pottery Painting, Bingo, and a new form of Bowls, played sitting down, is being introduced this year. The Club Minibus (adapted for wheelchairs) is used to pick up members from Marden, Sutton Valence and Maidstone as well as the local area. The Bus is also used, under special licence, for Thursday Lunch Club, Good Companions, outings for residents of Staplehurst Manor and McCabe Close Residents.

The Weald Club is fortunate in having some 20 Volunteers including five Drivers. Outings have been arranged for 2011 with trips to Tenterden Railway, Maidstone River Boat, shopping at Jempson's Rye, Hadlow College Farm and Christmas shopping. If you are house bound through age or disability and would enjoy a few hours out meeting other people please call Maggie Weller on 891870 we would be pleased to welcome you.

Ken Collins

POPPY'S DAY NURSERY & POPPY'S BABY CARE UNIT

Poppy's Day Nursery is located on Headcorn Road offering full day care and has been open since August 2008; we currently have 72 children 'on role'. With the increase in demand for places we

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opened our Baby Care Unit in December 2010 for children aged 3months to 2yrs located at London House, High Street. At Headcorn Road our children age from 2yrs to 5yrs and we provide care for many Staplehurst and surrounding village children being open Monday to Friday from 07:30hrs to 18:30hrs.

We have 17 members of staff most of who live locally and we provide opportunities for students from Angley school, Mid Kent College and West Kent College who come to us for experience within the nursery setting and some have since been employed from their college placements.

We access KCC courses to develop staff in all areas of nursery care. We maintain a partnership with pre-schools for children using both settings and have links with the Library and Primary school. We supported the Village Fete again this year with our stall.

Headcorn Road holds a 'Good' Ofsted rating and we are awaiting an inspection by OFSTED at the Baby Care Unit soon. The Mayor Councillor Eric Hotson attended our second birthday party in August joining celebrations with parents and children.

During the last year we have held events raising funds for charity, the Mayor accompanied parents and children for our sponsored walk through the village in October where £500 was collected for the Antenatal Results and Choices (ARC) charity, a further £65 was raised at our Christmas Raffle. We have also raised money in recent months for the Brain Injury Clinic, Children in need and Red Nose day.

During February half term the children were visited by the Arsenal Soccer School for a sports session and taught new ball skills using footballs, rugby balls and tennis rackets which they thoroughly enjoyed. For more information on Nursery care and job opportunities contact Katherine GEDGE Poppy's Day Nursery Tel: 01580 892600 Poppy's Baby Care Unit Tel: 01580 890480 Email:info@poppysdaynursery.com Website: <http://www.poppysdaynursery.com>