

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING OF STAPLEHURST
held in the South Hall, Staplehurst Village Centre on
Monday 11th May 2009

PRESENT – Nineteen residents signed the attendance list together with twelve Parish Councillors, County & Borough Councillor Eric Hotson, Borough Councillor Richard Lusty, PC Marc Pennicott, PCSO Pete Gardner, Rural Warden Chris Lomax, Assistant Parish Clerk Maria Norris and Parish Clerk Sue Bassett

APOLOGIES – Councillors Reardon and Perry.

MINUTES OF THE 2008 ANNUAL PARISH MEETING – These had been circulated and were taken as read. Approval of the Minutes was proposed, seconded and agreed by the meeting then signed as a true record by the Chairman of the Parish Council. There were no matters arising.

STAPLEHURST PARISH COUNCIL FINANCIAL STATEMENT – Copies of the (unadopted) Statement of Accounts had been circulated. Cash assets totalled £199,165.30 out of which reserves were ear-marked in the following sums:- General Fund £28,225.35, Youth Forum £7,500, Staplehurst Partnership grant £1,200.75, Jubilee Sports project £104,739.00, Village Centre Contingency Fund £16,284.45 and £41,215.75 underspend carried forward towards the budget for 2009/2010. There were no questions raised.

GYBBONS CHARITY ACCOUNT – The balance at 31.12.2008 stood at £2,989.52. Income received during the previous year from War Stock and Deposit interest totalled £90.84. Donations of £250.00 were made.

ANNUAL REPORTS

1. Staplehurst Parish Council Chairman – Councillor Arger began by expressing regret at the resignations of Councillors Stewart, Wood and Collins but welcomed Councillors Fairfax, Best and Sankey. New councillors brought a fresh approach and kept the Council on its toes.

Chairman Arger formally thanked all councillors for their hard work, for attending Council Meetings as well as others with partner organisations (primary care trust, highways, police, planners, transport and environmental services). Councillors had also attended training days, seminars and conferences to make sure Staplehurst was represented and involved with decision making which would impact on us all. Staplehurst Parish Council continued to highlight the needs and wishes of the community within an ever changing climate of greater community action.

Thanks were expressed to MP Anne Widdicombe, County/Borough Councillor Eric Hotson and to Borough Councillor Richard Lusty for their active and continued support of Staplehurst. Thanks were also given to Joan and Malcolm Buller for their lead with Speedwatch and to all the volunteers who gave of their time. Joan had become a councillor 25 years ago, had been on finance, planning and publicity committees and could always be relied on for meetings around Staplehurst. Chairman Arger thanked her especially for her commitment.

Chairman Arger was delighted to report that the Jubilee Field Changing Room Project had been completed and hoped users would enjoy their improved facilities. The Council continued to try to resolve the allotments issue following unsuccessful negotiations with Maidstone Housing Trust who now owned the Bell Lane allotments site. Discussions were ongoing with MBC to look at provision within the parish and a meeting with interested parties had been held.

Through the excellent work of the planning committee, led by Cllr Green, this Council's profile had been raised with regular attendance at MBC Development Control meetings. Well thought out responses, based on clear planning guidance and regulations were so important when planning issues were contentious.

Commitment to the youth of the village continued with payment of the youth club site lease/purchase, landscape and general maintenance. The club was now running regular sessions with key youth workers in place. The Web site had been revitalised and had received positive feedback. Thanks were expressed to all on the web site group and in particular David Henley of Zulogic. Quality status reaccreditation was due this year and though thus far had not brought noticeable benefits, it was considered important. The Village Update was part of the QPS process and Chairman thanked all who helped to distribute it quarterly. The Council was delighted with the work of assistant clerk, Maria Norris, in organising another successful Summer Playscheme.

Policing, as always, remained an issue of concern and were pleased that with Pete Gardner, Chris Lomax and PC Marc Pennicott, this parish received a good policing service. This was highlighted by the reduction in reported crimes but we must all remain vigilant.

One purpose of the Annual Parish meeting was to allow all local organisations an opportunity to report on their activities over the last 12 months. Chairman Arger thanked them all for their contribution to our community. In closing Councillor Arger thanked Councillors, Assistant Clerk and the Parish Clerk for their continued hard work and commitment for Staplehurst.

2. Chairman of Planning Committee – Councillor Green reported a significant drop in planning applications during the past year due to the economic situation but the Planning Committee had still been kept busy. Between 17/03/08 and 02/03/09 the following consultations had been responded to; 50 Full Planning Applications, 2 Retrospective Applications, 6 Listed Building Applications, 3 Certificates of

Lawfulness, 4 Variations of Conditions, 10 Changes of use, 3 Appeals (2 dismissed and 1 upheld), 8 Tree works within the conservation area, 16 Enforcement Issues (6 not proceeded with, 5 resolved and 5 ongoing). There were 54 decisions made where MBC had agreed with SPC, 11 decisions made where MBC had disagreed with SPC. Controversial and larger applications had included: 2 in Lodge Road Industrial Area, the development by Maidstone Housing Trust at Fir Tree Close and the 62 bedroom extension at Iden Manor Nursing Home (granted on 30/0409). Land off Winches Garth, application by Maidstone Housing Trust for redevelopment of the garage site behind Winches Garth, had since been withdrawn.

There had been a succession of applications both retrospective and formal for additional pitches and new gypsy sites including: Stable blocks at Park Wood Lane; residential (mobile) homes, tourers and utility blocks at Cradducks Lane, additional residential (mobile) homes, tourers, Goudhurst Road, Stable Block and additional hard standing at Maplehurst Lane, 1 residential (mobile) home, tourer and utility block, Land north of Willow End Cross at Hand, 8 residential (mobile) homes, 4 touring caravans, 2 utility blocks, 2 stables for 9 horses, hard landscaping for up to 12 vehicles plus associated residential paraphernalia at George Street. Despite the Parish Council's continuous representations of concern at the loss of open countryside to the indiscriminate development of gypsy sites within the parish, due to the accepted and recognised need for gypsy and traveller sites and the fact that MBC had not yet allocated land to address this need, this type of development would be granted permission despite being contrary to policies which set out to protect the open countryside for its own sake. Until council gypsy sites are found, this type of development would be allowed. The Parish Council would continue to argue and fight this type of application as they contradict clear planning policy and guidance to the detriment of the open countryside and other residents alike.

Other applications included the development at Crossways, the Beanbag Cafe application adjacent to the library and the proposed development of 40 industrial units on land off Duckhurst Farm Lodge Road. In closing, Councillor Green thanked the planning committee members for their careful and diligent consideration of all the planning applications and other matters that have arisen throughout the year.

3. Jubilee Sports Changing Room Project – Councillor Franks reported that the building would be formally opened on Sunday 17th May 2009 by the Mayor of Maidstone and Paul Dolan of the Football Association. Some works were still outstanding but these should be completed very soon. Councillor Franks thanked everyone for their support during the past year. The project had been a great deal of work – like running a small business – and the partnership working of the Football Clubs with the Parish Council had produced a successful result.
4. County Councillor Eric Hotson – Councillor Hotson referred to recent press coverage on Politicians' huge allowances. He and Councillor Lusty were 2 of 55 Maidstone Councillors with 100% attendance record which showed commitment. He had recently visited other Parish Councils, some of which were in difficult

situations with a shortage of Councillors. He thanked Staplehurst Councillors and staff for their good liaison. The work by Staplehurst Partnership followed Government emphasis that people could and should take more control from the bottom up. Genuine local causes had to have local representation for action to be considered.

Devolved budgets had been reduced in recent years and had to be spread amongst 6 parishes. In Staplehurst assistance had been given to the School garden project, Jubilee Pavilion, new goal posts, website and youth facilities. In future County Councillors would have £25,000 to spend on highway issues amongst 6 parishes. Guidelines for spending and control would be advertised and applications made through him. Kent Highways was beginning to improve, particularly with communication and regular reports of complaints were being given. KCC had recently been criticised for poor investment of £50M but was one of 122 institutions that had invested in the Icelandic Bank. KCC had taken a lead to fight for retrieval of the money which was one fifth of its overall portfolio. It was hoped that 80% would be returned. A Treasury Management Committee of Councillors had been set up to ensure a repeat did not occur. Councillor Hotson paid tribute to the incredible turn around in crime statistics and substantial drop in crime in the rural areas. If only similar reductions could be achieved for litter, drinking and speeding. Councillor Hotson reported on a KCC seminar which would bid for 20 mph speed limits in villages in future. He was also chairing a group to ensure emergency and maternity services remained at Maidstone Hospital. Councillor Hotson would be made Deputy Mayor of Maidstone in 2009 and Mayor in 2010. He considered this to be a great honour and would use his mayoral year to promote community projects.

5. Borough Councillor Richard Lusty – Councillor Lusty reported that at his monthly Surgery at The Library he was often asked for his views on planning issues. As Chairman of the MBC Planning Committee he was unable to give a view. Although some sessions were busy, many people did not visit despite vociferous outpourings on the website forum. Self-help would get the best results.

Councillor Lusty was also Chairman of the Employment and Development Panel to appraise the Chief Executive and Directors at MBC and this was important work. During the past year, Councillor Lusty had attended 117 meetings, 7 training sessions and spent 5 days at University learning to be a Councillor. He had received 5,500 emails, 180 letters and 450 telephone calls. Most of these connected with planning issues but also complaints about potholes, bonfires & enforcement issues. There was now great co-operation with the police.

Councillor Lusty reported that Joan and Malcolm Buller did a tremendous job with Staplehurst Interest Group. A laptop had been provided to Staplehurst Society and donations made to the Debt Advice Centre and CAB (for outreach at Staplehurst) from his devolved budget. The Community Room at Staplehurst Library was under threat from the proposed Community Café proposal and could mean no monthly surgeries in future. Parking problems around the Parade and Medical Centre required action. Councillor Lusty paid tribute to those working on the new accessible Station Footbridge project but explained that delays had

been caused by the presence of newts. A proper disabled toilet and new automatic doors had also been requested for the station building.

Councillor Lusty spoke about the high concentration of gypsies and travellers who had settled 10-15 years ago now asking for additional vans for their growing families. Forum postings were no substitute for proper consultation with the authorities. Councillor Lusty reported on the Kent International Gateway proposals where over 1,000 people from the community around Bearsted had turned out to lobby against this proposal. Communities needed to push for things they wanted. Councillor Lusty closed by thanking residents and the Parish Council for their support over the past year.

6. Police Report – PC Marc Pennicott spoke on the highlights of his report (which had been circulated to all present and would be filed with these minutes); A successful 12 months with 15% reduction in crimes. 30% reduction in anti-social behaviour. Main complaints received through PACT (Partners and Communities Together) were to do with speeding – 95 warnings and 12 prosecutions had been achieved. PC Marc Pennicott thanked everyone for their kind words about policing, local support was much appreciated. He then answered some questions from the floor.
7. Reports from local voluntary groups – In addition to the written reports which had been circulated to all present and filed with these minutes, the following verbal reports were received;

Scout Group – Councillor Best as the Chairman of Staplehurst Scout Group reported that 100 boys and 3 girls were currently in scouting in 5 sections; 2 beavers, 2 cubs and 1 scout troop. Much activity was taking place working for badges, visits, tournaments, fund-raising, camping and parades. The Scouts had delivered 1400 Christmas Cards in the parish, continuing a 20 year old activity. Borough Councillors Lusty and Hotson had assisted with grants to repair the scout hut roof and replace a marquee. Other local benefactors, Scarabs, had helped to refit the kitchen and cooker and SPAR had provided new tables and chairs. More leaders were needed but red-tape was making this difficult. There was a big waiting list but ratios were strict. All were welcome to attend the Scout AGM.

Staplehurst Society – Bill Piper reported that work on the History section continued and more material was needed. The new laptop was much appreciated for cataloguing items.

Friends of Staplehurst Health Centre – Robin Oakley reported that the Friends group had been very active and supported several health promotion information evenings; stop smoking campaigns, Prostrate care, strokes and diabetes and provided 1-1 help for Health Care Assistants. Some equipment had been purchased; digital scales, defibrillator, text books. Four newsletters had been circulated with the Village Update. Flu jab sessions for 700 people had been arranged.

Speedwatch – Malcolm Buller reported that the Speedwatch thresholds had recently been reduced following representations made to the Chief Constable. Many more speeding motorists were now being logged and letters would be sent to encourage more responsible driving.

Drama Group – Peter Day thanked the Village Centre for hosting the group productions (now in 63rd year) but urged the Parish Council to get a fixed stage and lighting. An appeal to get a project through would be made.

Maidstone Rural Youth Project – The report from the Detached Youth worker was read out by Chairman Arger and has since been added to the Reports filed herewith.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Mr Bassett made an observation that in Oxfordshire very few, if any, traveller sites were evident around rural villages and asked what was different in this area. Councillors understood that there were insufficient Council-organised sites.

.....(Chairman)

The meeting closed at 21:45