

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING OF STAPLEHURST
held in the South Hall, Staplehurst Village Centre on
Monday 11th April 2011

PRESENT – Twenty-five residents signed the attendance list together with ten Parish Councillors, County & Borough Councillor Eric Hotson, Borough Councillor Richard Lusty, PC Marc Pennicott, Rural Warden Chris Lomax, PCSP Pete Gardner and Assistant to Parish Clerk Deborah Jenkins.

APOLOGIES – Councillors Best, Frodsham, Parish Clerk Sue Bassett and residents Margaret Ashby and John Randall.

LOWLANDS SEARCH DOGS KENT – The Chairman introduced this voluntary organisation whose representatives gave an interesting presentation on the work they did as part of a national organisation working through the emergency services. They located vulnerable missing people who may have dementia or mental health problems using specially trained dogs working on scent.

MINUTES OF THE 2010 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. Cash assets totalled £114,094.04 which was divided into ear-marked reserves in the following sums:- General Fund £27,832.85, Allotment Fund £20,000, Surrenden PF pathway project £9,830, Youth Forum £5,250, Staplehurst Partnership grant £3,750.00, Jubilee Sports project £10,750, Village Centre Contingency Fund £16,629.57 and £20,051.62 underspend carried forward towards the budget for 2011/2012. There were no questions raised.

GYBBONS CHARITY ACCOUNT – The balance at 31.12.2010 stood at £2,991.62. Income received during the previous year from War Stock and Deposit interest totalled £19.53. No donations were made during the previous year.

ANNUAL REPORTS

1. Staplehurst Parish Council Chairman – Councillor Perry read out his report which was subsequently filed herewith and uploaded to the Parish Council website. In addition the Chairman thanked Councillor Margaret Arger for all her work over the past 12 years. In particular as Chairman, a position she held for 7 years and Chairman of Planning.
2. Borough Councillor Richard Lusty – Councillor Lusty explained that little had changed since his previous year's report except the volume of work which included looking after Maidstone Borough to ensure it was managed properly. There had been concerns in the village that 1,000 houses could be built in Staplehurst, if the Borough is to make provision for 10,600 new homes. In reality this should be much less. Staplehurst would be able to cope with the numbers

but consideration would need to be given to the road system to ensure it could absorb the extra vehicles. Flooding issues had been highlighted and Councillor Lusty had proposed that funding is set aside for works in Staplehurst. The monthly surgery at the Library continued to be held and many issues were raised by members of the community, which Councillor Lusty had assisted with. During the past year 490 hours had been spent in meetings and helping residents, including flooding, parking and planning issues. A major application for the Golf Course extension had been withdrawn thanks to resident Mr. Graham Study, having measured the road. Councillor Lusty paid tribute to the local policing team who had assisted with anti-social behaviour issues which had now improved. Meetings had been held with Helen Grant MP about traveller-related issues and a question in parliament would be put. Councillor Lusty stated that no supermarket chain was speaking to the Borough about development in Staplehurst at this time. The Borough and Staplehurst needed to get together to help Staplehurst businesses grow. In closing he thanked the Chairman for his support and Councillor Margaret Arger for her work as Chairman of Planning Committee.

3. County Councillor Eric Hotson – Councillor Hotson thanked the Parish Council for its work over the past year including those who would be standing down in May. He stated that new and good people would be joining the Council. This year he had enjoyed the great honour of being Mayor of Maidstone and in this capacity he had not been able to get involved in many issues at Borough level but politics at County level had not been affected. It had been a very difficult year at County but the next and following years would be much worse. Savings of £155M were having to be found, half of this had been saved this year due to a reduction in staffing levels. Next year it would be the services. If better services were wanted the new Localism Bill would empower local people to have more say. At Borough level the devolved budget had been reduced year on year to nothing the next. At County level Councillor Hotson would still have the £10,000 member's grant and £25,000 Highways funds to allocate to local parishes. He had set aside £12,000 for extending the lighting, speed limit and road surfacing in Marden Road. Funding had also been given to the primary school to improve the kitchen, towards the skating festival and other small projects. Councillor Hotson thanked the Councillors for all the work that they did.
4. Police Report – PC Marc Pennicott's report had been circulated, filed with these minutes and uploaded to the Parish Council Website. Councillor Hotson commented that since the previous year the rates of crime had increased slightly and asked whether these were controllable. PC Marc Pennicott replied that in September many changes are due to take place within the Police Force and that Maidstone would be merging with other areas. At present, it was not sure how this would affect Staplehurst but believed the rise in crime rates could be managed and there would be more neighbourhood policing.
5. Reports from local voluntary groups – In addition to the written reports from Kent Police, Community Warden, Parish Publicity & Website Group, Speed Watch, Staplehurst Calendar 2011, Carnival & Fete, Community Centre for Debt Advice, Staplehurst Free Church, Friends of Staplehurst Health Centre, Girl Guiding, Horticultural Society, Interest Group, Neighbourhood Watch, Patients Participation Group, Poppy's Day Care and Baby Unit, Scouts, United Reformed Church, Weald

Club for the Disabled, Rural Settlement Group which had been circulated to all present, filed with these minutes and uploaded onto the Parish Council website. There were no additional verbal reports.

ELECTOR'S QUESTION – “We would like to know what measures will be put in place to finally and effectively control speeding in this village.” Chairman Perry observed that in the Police Report, PCSO Gardner had now been trained to carry out speed-monitoring checks. Although PCSOs were not able to fine speeders, the deterrent factor was welcomed. The Parish Council often met with Kent Highways, regular speed checks were carried out and speed recognition signs had been installed. In addition, improvements in street lighting and speed limit extensions would assist the issue. A resident requested that the 30 mph speed limit in Headcorn Road be extended. Councillor Butcher commented that this had been raised with Kent Highways previously without success but was no reason not to ask again. Another resident suggested that Speed Watch signs be displayed on the entrances to the village. Chairman Perry commented that speed camera signs had been requested of Kent Highways. Councillor Hotson commented that he was willing to support more interactive speed signs. Mr. Buller then gave a few facts and figures about Speed Watch which had begun in 2006, had been out 99 times and 493 speeders logged. There were not many re-offenders but 359 letters had been issued to speeders in the Maidstone area within the last year but only 7 to Staplehurst residents. Staplehurst Speed Watch groups were in the top deployment of local parishes. Checks took place monthly and speeding was considered low when the teams were out (deterrent effect).

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

1. Golf Course application – Local resident Mrs. Mitchell expressed thanks to Mr Keith Herbert for all the work he had done to ensure the application had been withdrawn.
2. Car Parking at Station – A resident commented that Network Rail’s Strategy Report stated that car parking at Staplehurst station would be improved by 2013. He advised the Parish Council to enter into negotiations with Network Rail to establish what parking provisions would be made during these works.
3. Bus Services – It was noted that the Free Bus passes could not be used until 0930 and the 0907 had been cancelled. Councillor Spearink commented that the Transport Forum had put a lot of effort into fighting such cuts but without success. A resident commented that an Arriva bus parked on double-yellow lines every morning at the end of Chapel Lane which caused a restricted view. It was understood the driver was buying his breakfast.
4. Peter Day – Mrs Helen Warmington wished thanks to be recorded for the many contributions that Peter Day had made to the Parish during his lifetime.

.....(Chairman)

The meeting closed at 21:35