



STAPLEHURST PARISH COUNCIL

**ANNUAL REPORT
2006 - 2007**

Staplehurst Parish Council

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Staplehurst Parish Council

Established 1894

Staplehurst Parish Council represents an electorate of 4,561 people living within approximately 2,240 homes. The population census figure recorded in 2001 was 6,003.

The Parish Council is made up of 15 Councillors. All existing Councillors will stand down four days after the election date of 3rd May 2007 and some may restand for election alongside new nominees. The new Parish Council will begin functioning on 14th May 2007 and serve for four years until the next election in 2011.

Full Council meets monthly on the third Monday at 8 p.m. in the South Hall, Staplehurst Village Centre. The Planning Committee meets on the first and third Mondays at 7 p.m. and the Amenities Committee meets on the first Monday monthly at 8 p.m.. The Finance Committee meets quarterly by arrangement.

In addition to membership of Committees, many parish councillors also work within sub-committees on specific areas of activity and projects such as Website maintenance & Publicity, Jubilee playing field facilities or Staplehurst Partnership. Sub committees have no spending powers or direct influence on the Full Council and can include members of the public in an advisory capacity. Parish Councillors also represent the Parish Council on outside bodies for good liaison and communication within the community.

The Parish Office is open to the public on four mornings a week for enquiries, sales of MBC Green sacks and other council-related issues between 9 & 11 a.m. Planning application papers and other Council documents can be viewed on request. Staplehurst Parish Council has adopted Standing Orders and Financial Regulations.



5th March 2007 – Staplehurst Health Centre
opens its doors to patients

Chairman's Annual Report 2006-2007

Staplehurst Parish Council has done much in its past four years to highlight the needs and wishes of the community and carry on the sterling work of its predecessors within this climate of change towards greater community action.

In addition to the regular monthly meetings of Full Council, Amenities Committee and twice-monthly Planning Committee, Councillors have represented this Council at meetings with the primary care trust, highways, the police, the planning department and environmental services, to mention just a few. Training days, seminars, Library surgeries and conferences were also attended to ensure this Council was kept well-informed. We expressed the views and wishes of Staplehurst as a whole at every opportunity.

We have helped to get resolved the flooding which occurred outside the Village Centre whenever we had heavy rain. Following a site meeting with Highways Officers to discuss accidents at the bend beyond Cross at Hand, safety improvement works are now planned. We have invested in Speedwatch equipment to help deal with local concern at speeding vehicles. We welcome volunteers to take the training and use the equipment in the parish.

We continue negotiations with Maidstone Housing Trust which now owns the Bell Lane allotments and garage site, to ensure these important facilities are retained. Concerns regarding the Fir Tree Close future development have been raised as a more exciting and dynamic use of the site to accommodate older people is needed.

We have continued our commitment to the youth of the village by investing in the Youth Club site, cutting the grass and hedges and held discussions about a youth forum. The KCC funded youth worker will not be starting until 2008, but the club is renewing efforts to reopen fortnightly. I hope the new council will continue to support the needs and aspirations of our younger people.

Councillor Lin Plant moved away during the year and we were sorry to lose her. We welcomed Georgie Collins by co-option and she has brought youth and enthusiasm to the Council as well as legal expertise.

Although this year's Parish Election was uncontested, I thank all councillors for their efforts on behalf of Staplehurst. I hope the two new councillors and two future co-optees are up for the challenges of this community. Being a parish councillor is not for the faint-hearted, it is hard work and demanding of time, but very worthwhile.

Income & Expenditure Account

For the year ended 31st March 2007

INCOME

2006/2007

Deposit Interest	3,519.06
Donations towards Christmas Lights	475.00
MBC Concurrent Functions Grant	28,410.96
MBC Grant for Playscheme and Playscheme fees	3,658.68
Other Grants for new projects	30,000.00
Parish Precept	65,350.00
Sales, miscellaneous fees and donations	896.97
Skaters fund-raising, deposit interest and donations	6,430.11
VC contingency loan interest on deposit a/c	91.02

£138,831.80

EXPENDITURE

Allotment Lease	40.00
Caretakers' wages & equipment	2,090.84
CCTV maintenance and repairs	780.00
Christmas Lights 2006	1,728.28
Churchyard maintenance	4,671.20
Donations to community groups	729.46
General administration	48,138.20
Jubilee New Build Project	4,562.50
Jubilee Sports Field maintenance	3,182.63
New Burial area project	3,024.34
Parish Street Lighting & street furniture	2,384.34
Playscheme 2006	4,490.72
Skaters Project Phase 1	34,345.00
Speedwatch equipment	1,946.50
Staplehurst Partnership	474.55
Surrenden Playing field maintenance	10,469.87
Village Centre Loan repayment	16,500.00
Youth Club Lease and maintenance	1,225.09

£140,783.52

Balance of Expenditure over Income	-1,951.72
Balance brought forward from previous year	158,618.73

£156,667.01

Balance Sheet

For the year ended 31st March 2007

LONG TERM ASSETS

Interest-free Contingency Fund loan to VCMC as at 01 April 2006	8,507.00	
Less repayment received 08 March 2007	(4,000.00)	4,507.00

CURRENT ASSETS

VAT Recoverable		595.20
Cash In Hand		153,579.73
		<u>£158,681.93</u>

CURRENT LIABILITIES

Uncleared cheques at year end		- 2,014.92
		<u>£156,667.01</u>

REPRESENTED BY:

General Fund	36,276.80
Village Centre Contingency	15,463.46
Skaters' Deposit	4,516.87
Ongoing Project Reserves:	
Burial Authority Provision	6,000.00
Jubilee Sports Playing Field	57,632.50
Staplehurst Partnership Grant	1,500.00
Village Centre Loan	4,500.00
Youth Forum	1,500.00
Other reserves/underspends c/fwd	29,277.38
	<u>£156,667.01</u>

The preceding two statements are only a summary of the accounts. Copies of the full Statement of Accounts will be made available on the Parish Council Website at www.staplehurstvillage.org.uk and from The Staplehurst Parish Council Office.

Staplehurst Parish Council accounts are audited quarterly by Iden Business Services and the Annual Audit Return is made to the Audit Commission. The requisite Public Notice is given for electors to inspect the accounts annually.

Parish Councillors



Margaret Arger - Chairman

My husband and I have lived in Staplehurst over 30 years and I have been a member of your Parish Council for two terms. Councillors and I have worked closely with County and Borough Councillors as well as MP, the Police Authority, and the Primary Care Trust. At every opportunity we make sure the views and concerns of Staplehurst are presented in a clear and positive manner for the benefit of the community as a whole.

Barry Franks - Vice Chairman

I have lived in Staplehurst since 1969 and have always taken a keen interest in local affairs. In the past I have been actively involved with the Football Club and the PTA. I am on the Committee of the Horticultural Society and the new Friends of Staplehurst Health Centre. I have been an enthusiastic and pro-active member of the Parish Council and their representative on their Jubilee Field Management Committee.



Joan Buller - Member of the Planning & Finance Committee



I have served Staplehurst Parish Council for 24 years. In addition to the Planning and Finance Committees I am in the Rural Partnership, Website, Village Update and Speedwatch Teams. I am also the link councillor with the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme on which I serve as Treasurer. I enjoy being involved in the decision making processes and working with people. My aim is to improve the infrastructure and foster a better community spirit. With my husband I run the Staplehurst Interest Group and am a member of the Horticultural Society, the Library Book Club and the Staplehurst Library-Users Group. We regularly walk in the village and try to be aware of current issues.

Paul Butcher - Member of the Amenities Committee

As a local resident I have during my time put my energy and effort in to working with the many young people within our village, thus ensuring that the young people have a voice by finding out what they want and help raise funds to support them develop their skills. Through this work with the young people I am ensuring that the individuals and groups are progressing into helpful young people.



Wendy Green - Chairman of the Planning Committee

As Chairman of the Planning committee, most of the time I have spent on Council work has been connected with planning issues. On several occasions I have spoken at MBC Planning Control meetings and taken an active part in Council projects. I have ensured the burial ground extension project has progressed well in the past year and attended Library surgeries to listen to the concerns of residents and ensure action where possible.

Parish Councillors



Paul Kelly - Member of the Planning Committee

After moving to Staplehurst in 1996, I joined the Parish Council in 2000 as a member of the Planning Committee. Since then I have continually been involved with the Carnival & Fete and Youth Club associations. Also taking a post as School Governor in 2002 at Staplehurst Primary School, I have seen a village medical centre built in exchange for a 'super' new multi purpose school hall. I now look forward to more exciting projects for the future development of Staplehurst.

Angela Knowlden - Member of the Planning Committee

Over the past year I have enjoyed working with the Skateboarding Group and been involved in discussions relating to the new Health Centre. As a member of the Planning Committee I endeavour to ensure that the village is safeguarded from unnecessary and unwanted growth and 'infilling' whilst being honest to the reality of the needs of our village.

'Affordable' housing and parking are critical problems that are difficult to resolve.



Trevor Martin - Chairman of the Amenities Committee

The Amenities Committee has specific responsibilities for and oversees capital projects funded by the Parish Council. The long term development of facilities at the Jubilee Field has progressed over the past year and Nicholson Walk was completed. The Committee is also involved in day to day environmental issues such as grass cutting and hedgerow maintenance of recreational areas, supporting the summer Playscheme and Youth Club activities. It also liaises with Kent Highways on matters such as signage and road and lighting maintenance and with Maidstone Borough Council regarding the allotments and for street cleaning and rubbish disposal.

Roger Munn - Member of the Amenities Committee

I have lived and worked in Staplehurst for most of my life, as a farmer. This has given me a sound knowledge of the local area. I am married with two children, who have now left home. I am representing the Parish Council on Jubilee Sports Field, Headcorn Aerodrome and Churchyard Liaison committees.



Georgie Collins -

A lawyer married with a small child, I've lived in Staplehurst since 2003. I currently sit on the Planning and Amenities Committees. I'm a firm believer in the preservation of our rural life and to sustain this believe we must provide first class facilities and services. I'm enthusiastic and very committed to serving my community; I believe my skills and experience make me a valuable contributor to the Council and community.

Parish Councillors



John Reardon - Member of the Amenities Committee

Having moved to Staplehurst 7 years ago I was co-opted to the Parish Council in December 2004 and currently work for BT as a project manager. I am on the Amenities Committee which deals with the environment and local community issues. My aim for the next year is to become more involved in the future development of the Jubilee Playing Field. I am an active member of the Staplehurst Cricket and Tennis Club and am enjoying contributing to the work of the Parish Council.

Chris Rogers - Member of the Amenities Committees

Over the past year, due to increased family and business commitments, I have not been able to be as active within the Parish Council as I had hoped. I have decided not to stand for re-election so that a new candidate with plenty of energy, enthusiasm and more importantly, time, can stand in my place.



John Stewart - Member of the Planning Committee

As well as being a member of the Planning Committee and taking an active part in decisions of the Council I have been editing the Village Update with the Publicity and Website Group. The Village Update has improved the Council's communications with Staplehurst Parishioners, being delivered to every household on a quarterly basis. This group also produces the Annual Report and monitors the Website. These activities have helped the Council to maintain its Quality Council Status.

John Swannick - Member of Finance committee

Married with a young family and resident in Staplehurst for only 6 years, John has packed a lot in; he is Chairman of Staplehurst Cricket & Tennis Club, Staplehurst Rail Users' Forum convenor, Staplehurst Partnership co-ordinator and a committed member of the Parish Council as well. When time allows, John plays cricket, sits on the executive of a national political organisation and is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, Manufactures & Commerce (RSA).



Don Wood - Member of the Planning Committee

I am particularly pleased to be associated with the resurgence of interest and action on the Jubilee Field project; for far too long Staplehurst's very successful men's football teams have been forced to play outside the Village because our facilities are not up to Football Association standards. Similarly the Village Centre, a vital asset for community activities in Staplehurst has reached a critical stage; key decisions affecting its long-term future are urgently required.

Parish Clerk's Annual Report

Continuing the trend of recent years, 2006 was a year of much activity in the Parish Office to bring into effect the decisions made by the Parish Council. There is much background administrative work required to meet the expectations of Quality Status, Councillors and public.

Quarterly copies of the Village Update were prepared and distributed mainly by volunteers to every home in the parish, or by post to outlying areas. The Council's website at www.staplehurstvillage.org.uk was kept as up to date as possible and regular improvements were made to content and home page. A growing archive of photographs of events that have occurred in the parish has been popular. The Website Forum continues to be well-used and appreciated by contributors and browsers.

Together with open public access to Parish Council meetings, Minutes and other documentation being available on the website, it is surprising that many people still don't understand what the Parish Council does or how it can influence local decision making and infrastructure. We did our best to inform the electorate about the Parish Election in May 2007 through a variety of media and a training event, but insufficient candidates came forward to make this happen. Councillors Rogers, Martin, Munn and Swannick stood down and two new electors, John Perry and Peter Spearink stood for election. Co-option to fill the two vacancies will be one of the first jobs for Councillors at their first meeting on 14th May.

A very successful Playscheme was run for three weeks in the summer and a waiting list was in operation, so early booking is advised for 2007. Phase one of the skatepark project was completed and has been very well-used and remains popular. Planning approval for Phase two has recently been given as a further grant of £26,000 became available through MBC. Works to establish an indigenous hedge around the new burial area were undertaken by Councillor Wendy Green and more works will be undertaken to prepare this area for future use. Speedwatch equipment was purchased and teams of volunteers were trained to use it. Speedwatch is being successful in educating drivers to travel within the speed limits, although more volunteers are always welcome to increase the number of times it is used. Planning approval was received for the Jubilee Playing Field changing rooms project. Funding has remained elusive to date, but work is continuing on this.

There were two changes in Assistant Clerks during the year. Maria Norris joined the Parish Council on 3rd July 2006 and is now well into her role and provides invaluable support with Playscheme, paperwork and all the myriad of issues that pass through the Parish Office. Many issues raised by members of the public are not the direct responsibility of the Parish Council but we are happy to assist where we can with the benefit of local knowledge and contacts.

Committee Reports

Planning Committee – Staplehurst Parish Council Planning Committee has worked diligently this year to provide informed responses to all of the 117 planning applications that it has been consulted on. In addition a variety of other planning issues have received attention including 2 Certificates of Lawfulness, 6 works to trees with Tree Preservation Orders on them, 1 public inquiry and several appeals. There have also been 10 Enforcement Actions served within the Parish over the past year. The Parish Council has supported Maidstone Borough Council in defending the appeals made by applicants to the Secretary of State. However, an exponential increase in the number of appeals upheld is of great concern both to Borough and Parish.

One significant event for Staplehurst was the Public Inquiry held at the Village Centre to hear the appeal against the enforcement notices served against the occupier of agricultural land in the vicinity of Maplehurst Lane, Frittenden Road. The two day hearing was well attended and supported by concerned residents who gave evidence along with Staplehurst and Frittenden Parish Councils. Despite best efforts the Inspector allowed a temporary 3 year stay for the occupiers of this land.

Overall, the Parish Council continues to have a good working relationship with the Planning Department at Maidstone Borough Council. In fact statistics show that 88.5% of the Parish Councils recommendations correlate with the final decisions made by MBC.

Amenities Committee – The Amenities Committee of the Council has had a busy year as usual. Although it has direct responsibility for many aspects of village activities such as maintenance of sports and play facilities, it is also able to lobby the appropriate authorities on other matters which are important to villagers.

Perhaps one of the most important to many residents has been the provision of medical services in the new centre. It was understood that our existing doctors would provide such services, but when some doubt was voiced, the Committee was vocal in ensuring proper consultation.

During the year, discussions have been held with the train operator regarding a new footbridge with particular emphasis on accessibility for those with disabilities. Regular contact is maintained with the Borough Council, Kent County Council and Maidstone Housing Trust on such matters as allotments, footpaths, public toilets and street cleaning.

Despite some setbacks, the Committee feels much has been achieved. Discussions are under way to extend the Christmas lighting scheme which we hope will continue to benefit from the support of local businesses. The skater's park is up and running with further work planned. Hedges have been trimmed where appropriate (outside the nesting season).

On the negative side, vandalism still occurs from time to time which of course we all pay for through council tax, so please report such events every time.

Parish Facilities & Projects

Burial Ground – When it became evident that the existing burial space was slowly but surely being used up the Parish Council sort permission to include within the burial ground a part of the wild flower meadow to the South of the existing churchyard. It was very important that any use of this area was considered in conjunction with the wildlife biodiversity which exists in this area and that all care was taken to ensure that any works carried out were to the benefit and encouragement of wildlife.

Planning permission was duly given, with specific planning conditions, which included a specific planting scheme, landscaping and a diversity of burial methods. This diversity of burial methods includes an area for 'Green Burials', an area for the depositing of ashes and designation for conventional burials.

Another area has been designed into the plan to provide designated space for composting flowers and grass cuttings to be used for the benefit of the church yard and to encourage wildlife.

After planning permission was granted a scheme of works was implemented. A post and rail fence was built with access gates installed. The designated area was consecrated by the Bishop of Maidstone and the whole area was given an identity.

During the month of December the indigenous species hedgerow was planted and we are happy to report it is growing well. Further infilling of plants and the planting of several standard trees will shortly take place. These standards have been donated through the 'Free Trees Scheme' supported by KCC, Network South East and over seen and managed by Kent and Medway Countryside Partnership.

During the summer months the planning of the pathways which will criss cross the area will be designed and implemented. Further landscaping will ensure that the whole area takes on a holistic feel as it is important to keep this area as wildlife friendly as possible.

Further works will take place over the summer and autumn months. The plan is to ensure that the burial ground extension should be open for burials early in 2008.

Skatepark – After many years of planning, fund-raising and grant-finding carried out by the skaters themselves in partnership with the Parish Council, Phase one of the skatepark was installed and opened in late summer 2006. An additional source of funding was then found to enable plans to progress towards creation of Phase 2. It is hoped this second phase will be installed in early summer 2007. The skatepark has become a very popular and well-used facility at Jubilee Playing Field. Well done to the skaters and supporters who had the faith, energy and drive to see this project through.

Parish Facilities & Projects

Speedwatch – Teams of volunteers have been out and about in Staplehurst with the Speedwatch equipment. The roads agreed with the police to be monitored are seven sites in Station Road, Cranbrook Road, High Street, Marden Road and Headcorn Road, all in both directions. Our teams have noted over 100 vehicles for excess speed, the fastest recorded being over 50 mph on Church Hill. However, the teams are pleased that the majority of drivers are keeping to the speed limits, which is encouraging as this is the prime purpose of Speedwatch.

Our equipment is also available for hire to other Parish Councils and we already have a partnership with Headcorn. We have 21 trained volunteers who organise themselves into teams and decide when they can operate. There is room for more so please contact the Parish Office if you would like to join in.

Partners and Communities Together (PACT)

PACT is a Home office initiative looking at improving neighbourhood policing providing visible, accessible, knowledgeable and locally known officers to enforce order. Policing is now looking at a single crimes perspective providing for intelligent identification and targeted enforcement against crime and disorder. This leads to co-production of solutions between police, communities and other local agencies that are accountable. It was felt Neighbourhood Watch was a benefit to a community, but was not active in Staplehurst as there is no coordinator at present.

Problems continue to be regarding as mainly those of anti social behaviour, nuisance motor vehicles, dog fouling and speeding.

There is frustration about reporting crime and it has been highlighted that calls would not necessarily be picked up in Maidstone, which is why specific instructions are sometimes asked for.

Crime has to be reported to give statistical fact rather than perceived crime to justify Police response or initiative. It is agreed fear is a major factor because of the concern about reprisals as well as a more widespread apathy in that reporting crime would not change the situation.

Passing on information to PC Pennicott is a step in the right direction, but it is still a crime number which is required.

The need for good communication is vital and the monthly surgeries at the library with Borough Cllr Lusty, Police and Parish Councillors are of benefit in highlighting areas of concern and issues.

Council Members

at 31st March 2007

MARGARET ARGER - Chairman (ex-officio members) Ex. dir.
BARRY FRANKS - Vice Chairman (of all committees.) Tel: 891514
WENDY GREEN - Chairman Planning Committee Tel: 891607
TREVOR MARTIN - Chairman Amenities Committee Tel: 892033
JOAN BULLER - Planning & Finance Tel: 892746
PAUL BUTCHER - Planning & Amenities Ex. dir.
PAUL KELLY - Planning Tel: 892700
ANGELA KNOWLDEN - Planning Tel: 890639
JOHN REARDON - Amenities Mob: 07802 231692
CHRISTOPHER ROGERS - Amenities Tel: 892258
JOHN STEWART - Planning Tel: 892982
DONALD WOOD - Planning Tel: 891388
ROGER MUNN - Amenities Tel: 891861
GEORGIE COLLINS - Planning & Amenities Tel: 891352
JOHN SWANNICK - Finance Tel: 890750

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Member of Parliament ANN WIDDECOMBE Tel: 01622 769898
Kent County Councillor ERIC HOTSON Tel: 892312
Maidstone Borough Councillor ERIC HOTSON Tel: 892312
Maidstone Borough Councillor RICHARD LUSTY Tel: 891353

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Community Police PC MARC PENNICOTT Mob: 07980 770575
Parish Warden CHRISTOPHER LOMAX Mob: 07811 271254
Special Parish Constable KEN BAKER Ex. dir.

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Parish Clerk Mrs J SUSAN BASSETT 01580 891761
Assistant Parish Clerk Mrs MARIA NORRIS 01580 891761



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