

STAPLEHURST PARISH COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE FINANCE GROUP

PARISH OFFICE 19.00HRS 16th AUGUST 2012

MEETING NOTE

The Finance Group comprising of Councillors Burnham, Butcher, Kelly and Perry met to discuss the enclosed agenda. The Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) Mrs S Bassett was present. Apologies were sent by Councillors Green and Reardon.

It was noted that since the agenda was quite long some items would probably have to be deferred. It is planned to have a follow-up meeting within the next 14 days.

Agenda item 1: Purchase of third Stryker security camera.

It was noted that a grant of £1,250 from Councillor Hotson had already been received and we were also hopeful of receiving a grant from Golding Homes (£1,000 estimated). The group also took into account the success of the camera in Market Street. The Finance Group recommended that the Council should approve the purchase of a third camera. This camera would be based in Market Street but would be available for use elsewhere if needed.

Two quotes had been received, one from Cam Tech and the other from Stryker. The quote from Stryker amounted to a total cost of £7255 which included one year's maintenance. This quote was approximately £700 cheaper than Cam Tech's and it is recommended that the Council accepts the quote from Stryker. The spec for the camera would be the same as the camera currently installed in Market Street. The net cost after allowing for grants would be £5005.

Action: recommend that the Council approves the purchase of a third Stryker Polecat camera direct from Stryker Communications Limited.

Lease of Bell Lane Car Park from MBC

We wrote to Steve Goulette at Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) regarding the acquisition of the Bell Lane Car Park. MBC have responded that they would have no objection in principle to the transfer to Staplehurst Parish Council on a 20 year plus lease; the car park would be transferred in present condition plus legal costs which would likely be small. If this were to be acceptable MBC would draw up a lease and do the report to get the land transferred.

The recognised that there would be advantages to Staplehurst Parish Council to have control of this important piece of land. However there are issues that still need to be addressed. These include:

- The length of the lease and its conditions.
- The cost of bringing it up to standard.
- Whether the car park would be subject to rates.
- What would be the additional insurance costs?
- What would happen to the recycling bins?

We agreed to pursue these issues and in the meantime request a draft lease from MBC.

Recommendation: Staplehurst Parish Council is asked to endorse this approach.

Agenda item 3: Bell Lane Toilets-Replacement Windows

Three quotes had been received as follows:

1. Glazetech (Recommended by MBC) £1922.
2. Crittal (local based at Sandhurst) £835.
3. Pattenden (Work known) £1296.

It was noted that the cheapest quote seemed to give the most comprehensive response. All the quotes are VAT inclusive which can be reclaimed.

Recommendation: Staplehurst Parish Council is asked to approve the quote from Criials.

Agenda item 4: Allotments – Offer from Golding Homes

There was a general consensus that buying suitable land was likely to be extremely difficult if not impossible. Therefore any response should emphasise that we are actively seeking land and would they consider granting us money to clear or prepare land for allotment use.

Land down by the side of the youth club might meet the above criteria and this option should be pursued with the Allotments Group.

Recommendation: Staplehurst Parish Council is asked to endorse the above approach.

Agenda item 5: Surrenden Field – Potential expenditure

A levels survey had been carried out. Bourne had quoted £5000 for the drainage work. This was thought to be reasonable but two more quotes will be sought.

The repairs to the play area were discussed. Three quotes had been obtained and it was agreed that a further quote should be obtained from “Plain and Simple”. The aim will be to

finalise the position at the next meeting and make a recommendation for Staplehurst Parish Council to consider.

Recommendation: Staplehurst Parish Council is requested to note the position to date.

Agenda item 6: Skate Park – Potential Expansion

There was a general agreement that the Skate Park was a benefit to our community and that the UpRockin event had been a great success. Nevertheless there was scope for improvement and one company had sent in its ideas as to how this could be done. It was felt that the best and most cost effective approach would be to expand it gradually and consideration ought to be given to creating a fund for this purpose. In the meantime we should seek quotes and ideas from other suppliers.

Recommendation: Staplehurst Parish Council is asked to approve in principle the setting up of a fund to support the gradual expansion of the Skate Park. This would initially be funded from the precept year commencing 1st April 2013 and included in the budget for 2013/14.

Agenda item 7: Parish Council Office – Disposal of old computer

After discussing possible options it was agreed that we should adopt the suggestion proposed by Cllr Reardon which was to destroy the hard drive and then dispose of the rest.

Recommendation: Staplehurst Parish Council is asked to endorse the proposal put forward by Cllr Reardon.

Agenda item 8: Summation to date

The summation represented the current year position to date. The financial position still looks healthy and the statement was noted.

Recommendation: Staplehurst Parish Council is asked to note the conclusion of the Finance Group regarding the Summation to date.

Agenda item 9: Audit issues

The Internal Auditor has recently reviewed our accounts and internal controls and had no comments to make. There were no other specific comments to make regarding the audit. However, it was noted that NALC had prepared draft Financial Regulations to replace current Financial Regulations used by Parish and Town Councils.

The new Regulations follow the same pattern as the current Regulations but include much more detail and there is a whole new section to covering “Instructions for the Making of Payments. We are asked to respond by the 28th of September 2012. My initial view is that most of it can be adopted by Staplehurst Parish Council but some articles don’t really apply

and will need to be revised. For the time being we can note the draft and prepare our response.

Recommendation: Staplehurst Parish Council is asked to note that NALC has prepared revised Financial Regulations for consideration by Parish and Town Councils and that Staplehurst Parish will respond in due course.

Agenda item 10: Parish Council Payments – DCLG Consultation re two signatures and NALC Policy Consultation on cheque signatories.

This is ongoing and will be discussed in greater detail at the next session of the Finance Group.

Recommendation: Staplehurst Parish Council is asked to endorse the approach put forward by the Finance Group.

Agenda item 11: Effect of loss of Concurrent Functions Grant on the Precept

Given that the grant currently represents one fifth of our precept any significant reduction would be a serious matter for Staplehurst. The Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) had, on the request of the Chairman prepared a first draft precept calculation for 2013/14. This took into account likely future expenditure such as a third security camera and perhaps most importantly assumed a worst case scenario in which Staplehurst Parish Council would receive no grant.

It should be emphasised that this was a first draft and it is very early days. Nevertheless it is worth noting that on this basis the precept would need to go up by nearly 25%. The increase would still be less than 20 pence per week but in percentage terms it would very significant. However, if this scenario were to become a reality it is unlikely we would be alone and we could point the finger clearly at MBC. Interestingly the new precept requirement of £50.45 for a Band D property keeps Staplehurst still in the middle of the pack.

Recommendation: Staplehurst Parish Council is asked to note the position regarding the precept and the possibility that it might need to be increased significantly.

Agenda item 12: Localisation of Council Tax Benefits – Impact on Parishes

This will be deferred until the next session when it will be discussed in detail.

Recommendation: Staplehurst Parish Council is asked to note the position of the Finance Group.

Agenda item 13: Any other business

Three items were discussed. These were: Martial Arts Donation Request, Salt Bins and Three Year Contracts.

- **Martial Arts Donation Request**

The request was discussed in some detail and some concern was raised as to the status of the organisation. Nevertheless there was a feeling that provided we were happy with the overall set-up consideration could be given to a donation being allowed for in the next budget. Recommendation: Staplehurst Parish Council is asked to approve in principle to providing for a donation in its budget for 2013/14.

- **Salt Bins**

A quote for 8 additional salt bins was costed and put forward for the Finance Group to consider. After a long discussion it was felt that the addition of an additional 8 bins was not fully justified at this stage. However, it considered that there certain areas in the village that would benefit. Therefore based on current surveys the Finance Group considered it could recommend 3 additional bins to placed in the following areas: Bower Walk, Benden Close and Fisher's Road – Newlyn Drive. Recommendation: Staplehurst Parish Council is asked to approve the purchase of three additional salt bins.

- **Three Year Contracts**

It was suggested that consideration be given to awarding three contracts at a fixed price for the whole period. This could provide guaranteed work for the period while at the same time providing price stability for Staplehurst Parish Council. However, in the subsequent discussion some issues were raised such as the fact that a supplier would build in possible price increases into the contract and this might not be to our advantage. It was agreed that we should re-visit this issue next time.

Recommendation: Staplehurst Parish Council is asked to note the position of the Finance Group on this issue.

John Perry

17 August 2012