

Village Update

WINTER 2013

www.staplehurstvillage.org.uk

Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan Did you have your say? Hundreds did!

“ All places are either growing or declining. Nothing stays the same. But a good plan can let you manage growth on your terms. ”



**FUTURE OF
STAPLEHURST**

This was the key message delivered by Richard Eastham of FERIA Urbanism who led the team employed on your behalf by Staplehurst Parish Council. It is vitally important that the Staplehurst community has the opportunity to make their case for any future development and set out what is acceptable development to us. The two key events, the 'Visioning Event' and the three day 'Design Forum', have taken place which enabled everyone to give their views and so shape an early vision of the future of Staplehurst.

Visioning Event

The Visioning Event took place in the North Hall of the Village Centre on the evening of the 12th September 2013. Key stakeholders, village groups, charities and business owners were invited to attend.

We formed into groups who enthusiastically moved around completing all of the designated tasks. These highlighted what was good about Staplehurst and what needed to be improved. One task concluded that Staplehurst was a 'safe, friendly and caring community' whilst another concluded that 'Housing Growth'



Brain-storming at work

was a major concern. The results of that evening enabled the FERIA team to form a framework for the Three Day Design Forum.

Three Day Design Forum

The forum lasted from the 8th to the 10th October. Its aim was to look to the future of at least 20 years. The process was not about taking decisions, but about testing ideas. There was a very good turn out, with an average of 129 people attending on each day and a further 120 people signing in for the final presentation on the last night. There was a good mix of residents, land owners and developers attending throughout the exercise. The North Hall was busy from morning until evening enabling commuters and workers to attend the event.

Tuesday

Richard showed slides illustrating the tasks at the Visioning Event and introduced the programme for the week. Twelve presentations from individuals and those representing groups or businesses set out their ideas for Staplehurst. We began with four children from Staplehurst Primary School who clearly presented their hopes and concerns for the future and especially how development would

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Staplehurst

Parish Council

affect the school. There was warm applause from all the adults. This session ended with a local resident reminding us of the importance of considering wildlife in all our plans. To end the morning various maps of Staplehurst were laid out and groups highlighted the positives and negatives of many locations. This gave us a real 'sense of place' and from this, three areas were identified for site visits in the afternoon.



Groups take part in Strategic Mapping Exercises

One group looked at the southern approaches and identified the ridge as a dominant feature, as well as the traffic issues of the long straight A229. The second studied the inter-connections between the school, library, health centre, shops and Village Centre. The other group looked at the railway station area and how a supermarket might impact. Upon return to the Village Centre groups transferred their ideas and solutions to maps and paper, finally presenting their thoughts to each other. We were delighted that some young people came in after school to give their views. The findings from Day 1 were displayed on the wall so that those attending the open evening studio could see how much progress had been made and add their own comments. Youth Club members also worked with one of the team to add their thoughts. The hall emptied after a twelve-hour shift!

Wednesday

Richard began the day with a visual presentation to aid his summary of the work so far. He introduced the first "concept drawing" which had a strong green edge with potential sites for new housing developments and good connection routes throughout. Groups formed to try to answer "What if?" questions and plot suggestions on more detailed maps. One group visited the station area again, this time looking at the industrial sites and land north of the railway line. Traffic congestion at the traffic lights prompted several innovative ideas and the length of the A229 having several distinct characteristics brought new thinking. Other groups looked at housing and the future of the Village



Residents assess the A229 Crossroads

Centre building. Work was again discussed with everyone before being displayed on the walls for the evening participants to engage in lively debate and register their thoughts.

Thursday

After his summary introduction Richard suggested that groups study in greater detail the ideas generated so far on The Parade, The Village Centre, The Crossroads and The Station Square Concept. A further group travelled further out around the parish, including Knoxbridge and Cross-at-Hand, noting the importance of the countryside in giving

Staplehurst its rural character which is highly valued. Places of commerce, landscape, architectural features and the impact of traffic were noted. The afternoon saw a group study Community Infrastructure focussing on the detail of highways, waste-water capacity and education provision and another group the phasing of Housing Development.

After 60 plus hours of work the Feria Team produced a Concept Drawing which brought all the work together. This drawing will be a very useful tool for testing the different options for growth and change.



Groups present their findings to one another

Final Presentation

This presentation was eagerly awaited to see what Feria Urbanism would conclude from the three day process. Over 120 people attended and they were presented with a professional early vision of the future. This vision concluded that the Village could maintain strong green rural edges whilst accommodating a level of appropriate housing growth. It also provided for improvements to key areas of the Village such as the Railway Station, Crossroads, Shopping Parade and Village Centre Building.

The audience were able to ask questions and make comments on the results generated by 60 hours of intensive work. Richard emphasised the need to make strong connections for pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles and to design spaces for multi-purpose uses. The quality buildings of today should be the conservation areas of tomorrow. Developers – please note!

Thanks were expressed to the Feria team for their tireless patience and professionalism, the WI for the free-flowing tea and biscuits, Sobell Lodge for lunchtime refreshments, the Village Centre Management for re-arranging bookings to free-up the hall and the Parish Council for enabling so many people to talk to each other. Some residents attended every session, some took leave from work, some were very young and some not, but everyone's ideas and opinions are valid. The Parish Council would like to thank everyone who participated in any way in these three days. Working together, looking at the parish of Staplehurst as a whole, was a unique and exciting experience for us all. This is one large step along the way to producing the Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan which will be consulted upon, scrutinised, refined and perfected before being submitted to

everyone in a future referendum.

As all ideas generated have been recorded there are many that are very controversial as well as supported. Accompanying this Update is a copy of the "Concept Drawing". To appreciate this fully please view the slide show which is available via our website www.staplehurstvillage.org.uk or at the FERIA Urbanism site <http://www.feria-urbanism.eu/#/staplehurst-downloads/4579485646> We hope to display this work in Staplehurst Library.

Staplehurst Parish Council has agreed to publish the concept drawing and a digest of the slide show to enable the wider public to understand the ideas developed at the 3 day workshop. It also agreed that it was not endorsing development of any of the sites marked as possible locations for housing or economic development. Such decisions will only be made at later stages in the consultation and planning process.

If you have comments, ideas or queries on the Neighbourhood Plan, please contact the Parish Clerk.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Neighbourhood Plan has taken up a large part of our attention. We have recently completed a three day design forum involving the whole community. The outcome from this forum is enclosed with the Village Update. I must emphasise that this is a dynamic process and does not necessarily represent the views of the Parish Council.

We are now considering our budget for 2014/15 which will lead to a revised Parish Precept to be levied as part of the Council Tax. We were particularly concerned at the loss of the Concurrent Functions Grant and its replacement with the Parish Services Scheme leading to a significant reduction in income for the Parish. We are anxious to ensure that at the very least the current level of income is protected. In addition we are striving to continue to receive the Council Tax Support Grant in respect of changes to the benefits system. We are working closely with the Kent Association of Local Councils and Maidstone Borough Council to ensure the Parishes' position is taken into account.

PARISH COUNCIL MEETINGS

Local electors and the press have a right to listen to Parish Council Meetings, but not to take part. At the beginning and after the closure of the Parish Council Meeting the Chairman will invite members of the public to speak for a maximum of 3 minutes each relating to issues on the Agenda or about issues of local concern. You are requested to state your name and address prior to speaking. The Parish Council as a planning consultee makes recommendations to MBC which makes the decision. All meetings are held in the South Hall, Village Centre. Planning Committee meetings begin at 7pm with Full Council following on at 7.30pm (if planning agenda is short). Contact the Clerk for details or check the website calendar page.

Meetings (all Mondays) in 2013 are:-

November	18th	
December	2nd	16th

Meetings (all Mondays) in 2014 are:-

January	6th	20th
February	3rd	17th
March	3rd	17th

The Parish Council will continue to take a proactive approach to the provision of services. It currently provides a number of key services for the community which include maintaining public toilets, street cleaning, CCTV and youth services in the most cost-effective way possible. We are now investigating the possibility of ownership of Surrenden Field which the Parish Council currently operates and maintains on a long lease from MBC (renewal in 2019). We believe this open space is very much part of the community and it would make much more sense if it was owned by the Parish. We are exploring the possibility of acquiring the freehold. This would bring it into line with the Jubilee Field which the Parish Council already owns and maintains.

The Neighbourhood Plan is likely to dominate our attention over the coming period and it is essential that we do not lose momentum.

John Perry

Chairman, Staplehurst Parish Council

PLANNING UPDATE

The Full Council meeting on 4th November considered a fresh planning application (MA/13/1726) from Tesco Stores for a new foodstore and a new station car park immediately north of the station. The meeting voted to recommend refusal for a number of reasons, particularly on traffic issues and the location of the proposed new station car park.

On the same evening, the Planning Committee recommended refusal of an application (MA/13/1456) from Vogt Solar for a 53-acre photovoltaic array on agricultural land at Great Pagehurst Farm. Objections were particularly over the impact on the landscape and uncertainty about the effect on wildlife.

Other recent Planning recommendations have included support for a development of six houses at Fisher's Oast, Fisher's Road (MA/13/1580). The committee opposed revised proposals for three houses on the site in Chapel Lane behind the former pub (MA/13/1657), which it felt represented over-intensive development and had inadequate provision for parking.

Please note that the Parish Council does not make a final decision on planning applications, only a recommendation which is considered by MBC together with other evidence. If you have concerns over any planning application it is important to send these to MBC as well as to the Parish Council.

BUSES AGAIN

There have been serious problems with our Number 5 bus route throughout the spring and summer and the Parish Council has been pressing Arriva to improve the service.

The recent complaints have lessened, but please continue to let the clerk and Arriva know of any poor service you experience.

However, since the start of this school year there has been a series of very disturbing incidents with the buses serving our secondary school children.

The Parish Council, Arriva local management, the schools and our County Councillor Eric Hotson have been working to address these problems. At a joint meeting on 31st October, Arriva said that they would be able to solve some of the problems by supplying a dedicated Cornwallis bus that would go right into the school to drop off and pick up.

There is, of course, a financial cost to this and Cllr Hotson is now going to attempt to get KCC to pay for this service.

Another idea was to stamp the children's passes with different colours so that the drivers could direct them to the correct bus in order to spread out the demand.



Alternative transport?

MOBILE POLICE CONTACT POINTS

Kent Police is sending mobile units to visit selected locations in West Kent to provide a visible contact point for police services. They will be making fortnightly visits to the Parade between noon and 1pm on Fridays 22nd November, 6th and 20th December. For further information visit http://www.kent.police.uk/contact_us/pages/Maidstone_meetings.html

MAYORAL VISIT TO STAPLEHURST

Back in September the Mayor of Maidstone Cllr Clive English hosted a Cheese and Wine charity day in Staplehurst. It was attended by 25 Mayors and their consorts from all over Kent and South East London and one from Essex. This was in aid of the Mayor's Charities for his year in office. They met for a reception courtesy of the Kings Head where they had a chance to meet each other. They visited Kingcott Cheese to see how Kentish Blue and Bluebell cheese is made and then had lunch at Greenworld with another chance to socialise and find out from your Councillors all about our Parish. The afternoon was spent in a glorious visit to Hush Heath Winery to see how its award winning pink sparkling wine and ciders are made. It is a mark of how important we are viewed these days by MBC that we were chosen for this event and all visitors went home extremely impressed with Staplehurst and our welcome.

CHRISTMAS LIGHTS

The Parish Council will once again be putting up Christmas lights. This year however the motifs will be illuminated by LED lights. Although more expensive to purchase than the old bulbs these are less vulnerable to bad weather and vandalism. They also use less electric power so should be cheaper in the long run. We hope you enjoy them!

Parish Council Information

COUNCILLORS

John Perry (Chairman)
Tom Burnham (Joint Vice Chairman)
Paul Kelly (Joint Vice Chairman)
Paul Butcher (Chairman of Planning)
Margaret Ashby
Joan Buller
Anne Gosling
Simon Green
Neal Kemp
Sam Lain-Rose
Barrett Manning
John Reardon
Adele Sharp
Rory Silkin
Peter Spearink

CLERK

Mr Mick Westwood

RESPONSIBLE FINANCE OFFICER

Mrs Sue Bassett

ASSISTANT to CLERK

Mrs Deborah Jenkins

Address:

The Parish Office,
Village Centre, High Street.
Staplehurst TN12 0BJ

Email: clerk@staplehurstvillage.org.uk

Tel: 01580 891761

Opening hours:

9am to 1pm Mondays to Fridays,
except on Thursdays when it is by
appointment.

SURGERIES AT THE LIBRARY

Two Parish Councillors will attend a surgery at the Library on the second Saturday of each month from 10am until noon. Borough Councillor Lusty's surgery will continue on the last Saturday of each month. PCSO Pete Gardner will hold Police Surgeries on these Saturdays at the library:-
November 23rd 10am to 11am
December 21st 10am to 11am

You are welcome to talk through any local problems or ask questions about local issues.

