

Staplehurst Parish Council - Report	
Committee, Group or Sub Group	
STAPLEHURST PARISH COUNCIL POLICY GROUP MEETING	
Meeting Date & Venue	
STAPLEHURST PARISH OFFICE 19.30HRS 13 JULY 2011	
Report Author	
Report	
<p><b>MEETING NOTE</b></p> <p>The Policy Group met to discuss the attached agenda. Those present were Councillors Burnham, Butcher, Green, Paul Kelly, Perry, Silkin and Spearink. Councillor John Kelly sent his apologies.</p> <p>The meeting concentrated on items three and four of the agenda (Development of Parish Clusters and Village Centre Re-Development/Maintenance) which had been deferred from the previous meeting.</p> <p><b>Development of Parish Clusters</b></p> <p>A wide ranging discussion took place. It was noted that a number of services could be provided. For example expansion of the street cleaning services might be considered; other possibilities might include support services such as accounts and general administration. It was also highlighted that Clusters could involve various different models depending on the nature and type of service required.</p> <p>The idea is not new and there are papers presented to the Society of Local Council Clerks which set out ideas for consideration and give examples of how this has worked in practice. However, with the Localism Bill making its way through Parliament and a Government White Paper on Local Government, the whole idea has been given new impetus.</p> <p>The Policy Group considered that Staplehurst Parish Council should take a proactive role in taking this matter further. There it recommends and asks the Council to endorse the following:</p> <p>Staplehurst Parish Council will invite representatives from neighbouring Parish Councils to attend a meeting hosted by Staplehurst Parish Council to discuss ideas for taking this matter forward. Parish Councils will be encouraged to put forward proposals for consideration. If this is agreed the Chairman will send an invitation to the Chairmen of the following Parish Councils: Boughton Monchelsea, Chart Sutton, Coxheath, Headcorn, Linton, Marden and Sutton Valence.</p> <p><b>Village Centre re-development/maintenance</b></p> <p>It was accepted that this was a longstanding issue and from a Parish Council perspective was made more difficult by the fact that ultimate ownership was in the hands of the Staplehurst Village Centre Trust which was a registered charity. There was a general consensus that the building was increasingly not fit for purpose, and could, given its current state of repair, become very expensive to maintain.</p> <p>Clearly developing a new Village Centre would be a major project and could probably only be financed if the existing building was demolished for redevelopment. However, for some residents this building has some emotional attachment and this might generate opposition. It is also difficult to gauge how much support there would be for this project. There was also the issue of where the new building should be developed, especially as some village societies do like a central location. In the end it was felt that the Jubilee Field area was the most likely choice. It was noted that landowners might be more amenable to sell agricultural land for developing a new village centre.</p>	

If we want to take this forward we will have to convince and work with the Village Centre Trust; up to now they do not appear to have shown much enthusiasm for taking any action. It was noted that with the new Free Church facilities soon to come on stream there could be competition for the facilities currently provided by the Village Centre and this might be a factor in convincing the Village Centre Trust that something needs to be done.

After further discussion it was agreed that the Policy Group should continue to pursue this issue and recommends that the Council endorses the following initial actions:

The Policy Group will:

1. Investigate the status of the Village Centre Trust with the Charities Commission.
2. Ascertain the cost to Staplehurst Parish Council of renting facilities at the Village Centre.
3. Consider options for obtaining evidence/information to support the development of a new centre.
4. Consider possible sites for a new centre including Jubilee Field and its environment. Consider the possibility of linking a new site with the development of allotments.

Any other business

There were three items discussed. These were IT Strategy and the re-equipping of the Parish Office with new equipment, signage in the village and enlargement of the skate park.

In the case of the IT Strategy it was noted that there had been an exchange of e-mails between Councillor Green and Councillor Reardon and the Policy Group supported the conclusions reached. Councillor Green will pursue this matter and report back to the Policy Group and keep the Publicity and Website group informed regarding his recommendations. Turning to the issue of signage, most felt that this needed to be improved in the village and signs to the Village Centre, Jubilee Field and the Public Toilets were needed. However, there was a note of caution that we did not want to go overboard with signage which can become intrusive. It was agreed that the Chairman should take this up with Councillor Eric Hotson to see if there was any funding available.

Finally, the possibility of enlarging the skate park was considered. It was noted that this had been a great success and Staplehurst was now hosting a major event. The idea will remain on the table for future consideration.

John Perry

Date & Venue of next meeting	
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14 July 2011 Parish Office
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