

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING OF STAPLEHURST
held in the South Hall, Staplehurst Village Centre at
8.00pm on Monday 23rd May 2016

PRESENT – Sixteen residents signed the attendance list. Also attending were nine Parish Councillors, County Councillor Eric Hotson, Borough & Parish Councillor John Perry, Borough Councillor Louise Brice, Community Warden Mira Martin, Lisa Greenhead and Sue Sharp (Woodland House), John Swannick, Joy Henson and Tom Henson (Staplehurst Cricket & Tennis Club), Responsible Finance Officer Sue Bassett, Assistant Clerk Deborah Jenkins and Parish Clerk Mick Westwood.

APOLOGIES – Parish Councillors Paul Butcher, Chris Claridge, Paul Kelly and Barrett Manning; Mr Robin Oakley; Mrs Mary Shaw; PCSO Pete Gardner.

PRESENTATIONS – Councillor Rory Silkin took the Chair and welcomed Lisa Greenhead and Sue Sharp (Woodland House) and John Swannick, Joy Henson and Tom Henson (Staplehurst Cricket & Tennis Club). Woodland House: Lisa Greenhead described how Woodland House provided a range of therapies and activities for adolescents with mental health problems. Most young people come from Kent and Medway but there are places for out-of-area referrals. Ms Greenhead said there was a structured programme of educational and leisure activities which took place on site but also encompassed trips out. A question and answer session took place covering a number of points: referrals are made in different ways including from A&E departments; schools liaison happens as required; two specialist volunteers help at Woodland House but non-specialist volunteers are also welcome to make contact; Woodland House will have a stall at this year's Carnival. Staplehurst Cricket & Tennis Club: John Swannick, Joy Henson and Tom Henson gave a presentation about the club. It has 438 members. There are 120 junior cricketers and 60 junior tennis players. It is a community amateur sports club open to all, thereby securing some benefits of charitable status without the administrative burden. The club's premises are used by Staplehurst Running Club and are a designated rest centre for the Emergency Help Team. The club is keen to reach out into the community and works closely with Staplehurst School. It is funded through its members, its fund-raising initiatives and trading activity, principally the bar. Annual funding needs are about £30,000. Investment priorities are an all-weather capability and upgrading of the tennis facilities. A question and answer session took place: limited land and increasing demand mean the club has to manage resources intelligently; notwithstanding this, the club welcomes new members.

MINUTES OF THE 2015 ANNUAL PARISH MEETING – These had been circulated beforehand. There being no comments, the Minutes were signed as a true record by the Chairman of the Parish Council, Rory Silkin. There were no matters arising.

STAPLEHURST PARISH COUNCIL FINANCIAL STATEMENT – Copies of the Statement of Accounts had been circulated and the Statement was accepted by the meeting. Net current assets totalled £135,944.47 represented by funds and reserves in the following sums: General Fund £48,750; Allotments £10,000; Surrenden Playing Field project £16,500; Village Centre Feasibility Fund £8,505.00; balance of underspent sums carried forward £27,770.58; plus reserves held on behalf of others totalling £24,418.89.

ANNUAL REPORTS

Staplehurst Parish Council Chairman – Councillor Rory Silkin reported on an active year for the Parish Council and how interesting it was to lead a council made up of so many different characters. He thanked parish, borough and county councillors for their hard work on behalf

of Staplehurst. He commented on the volume of planning applications scrutinised by the Parish Council's planning committee and expressed the hope that the Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan would before long be in a position to proceed to referendum. He was happy to confirm that the Parish Council had held the parish precept at its previous level. He thanked Councillors Manning and Spearink for all their efforts to secure improvements in the bus service and thanked Helen Grant MP, PCSO Pete Gardner and Community Warden Mira Martin for all they do for the community. Finally, he congratulated Councillor Joan Buller on the award of the British Empire Medal in the New Year's Honours list.

Borough Councillor Louise Brice – Councillor Brice reflected on her first year as a borough councillor. She said that planning issues had featured prominently in her work. Although opposed to the number of new houses proposed in the Maidstone Local Plan, she remarked on her disappointment that the absence of an agreed plan meant that Community Infrastructure Levy payments were not being secured from developers. She had been involved in lobbying for improved bus services and in dialogues with representatives of Network Rail, Sainsbury's and the Parade's owners. She remarked that persistence was often necessary, for example some twenty phone calls were necessary to secure footpath resurfacing between Corner Farm Road and Station Road. Looking forward, Councillor Brice said she was working on issues including possible sports hall provision and health centre improvements as well as looking at the activity of Maidstone business entrepreneurs to identify ideas for Staplehurst. Councillor Brice thanked members of the community and Parish Council and office for their support and Borough Councillor Perry for his guidance.

Borough Councillor Perry – Councillor Perry spoke of his involvement in at least 40 hours of meetings about the Maidstone Local Plan and his opposition to the proposed housing numbers. However, he also stressed the importance of formalising the plan as soon as possible, to reduce vulnerability to over-development, as well as securing a strong Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan. He thanked Mr John Kelly and the Parish Clerk for their work on the Neighbourhood Plan. Councillor Perry said that ward councillors in some rural areas had formed a rural alliance to counter a perceived town-centric focus in Maidstone and to fight on important rural issues such as the status of the Low Weald, housing development and provision of rural bus services. He thanked Councillor Spearink, Borough Councillor Brice and Mrs Tina Jordan for their hard work on bus service issues. He said he served on a number of committees including Planning Committee and thanked Councillor Joan Buller for her support of Staplehurst's cause at committee meetings. As a member of the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee he championed parish causes. He reported he was now deputy leader of the Conservative group of councillors at Maidstone Borough Council and had taken up with government ministers concerns about planning and housing issues. He thanked County Councillor Hotson, Borough Councillor Brice, Parish Councillor Silkin and the Parish Clerk for their support during the past year.

County Councillor Hotson – Councillor Hotson thanked Councillor Silkin, parish councillors and the Parish Office and said that he valued his regular meetings with them. He congratulated Councillor Buller on the award of the British Empire Medal and commended the hard work undertaken by Borough Councillors Brice and Perry. He said that he had been pleased to support many Staplehurst initiatives with funding, including the Guide Centre roof, the Emergency Help Team, the Village Clean-Up, railings in the High Street and Speedwatch. He had also put funding into measures to address speeding on the A229 at Knoxbridge and had worked closely with Councillor Manning on this issue. He advised that KCC was receiving less government grant and needed to make savings, so some non-statutory services could be vulnerable. He said his workload now encompassed chairing the Commissioning Advisory Board and sitting on the Scrutiny Committee and Governance &

Audit Committee. He had also taken on the chairmanship of the Maidstone Joint Transport Board.

PCSO Report – PCSO Gardner’s report had been previously circulated and was made available at the meeting. In the year to March 2016 Staplehurst continued to have a low level of crime. The parish’s CCTV cameras had again proved to be useful. There were no questions. The report was published at http://www.staplehurstvillage.org.uk/annual_parish_meetin.aspx.

Reports from Local Groups – Fifteen written reports (published on the village website at http://www.staplehurstvillage.org.uk/annual_parish_meetin.aspx) were made available at the meeting. Mr Andrew Watson as Chair of Staplehurst Emergency Help Team appealed for more volunteers to come forward. He stressed that the team was not a substitute for the recognised emergency services and that no specific skills were required. He also commented that a register of vulnerable people was being established and invited interested parties to contact him. Mr Malcolm Buller as Speedwatch Team Leader demonstrated the new Speedwatch equipment which has a much longer range than the old equipment and had to date been used on six occasions in the village to good effect.

ELECTORS’ QUESTIONS & COMMENTS

Mr Ken Collins commented that the Weald Club for the Disabled was now an independent charity. He said it needed more drivers and invited any interested people to contact the secretary (details at http://www.staplehurstvillage.org.uk/village_life.aspx).

The meeting closed at 9.35 p.m.

Chairman.....