

STAPLEHURST PARISH COUNCIL

FINANCE GROUP MEETING

PARISH OFFICE 15:00 HOURS 22 OCTOBER 2013

MEETING NOTE

The Group met to discuss the attached agenda. Those present were Councillors Butcher, Green, Kelly, Lain-Rose and Perry. Apologies were received from Councillors Burnham and Reardon.

Agenda item 1: Donations

The Group recommended that the current donations should be retained. In addition it was felt that consideration should be given to having a rolling programme whereby each year a particular body that benefits the community could be considered for a donation.

The Group recommended that letters and a donation should be sent to the WI and Sobell Lodge; £100 each was recommended.

Finally, the Group discussed the possibility of making a donation to Councillor Hotson for his interactive speed sign at Church Hill. £1000 was considered to be a reasonable amount but more information was required regarding the possible siting and the information it would provide. It was recommended that this should be discussed with Councillor Hotson.

Agenda item 2: Bell Lane Car Park

The Group noted that Maidstone Borough Council had offered a 25 year lease which the Group initially felt was unattractive. The pros and cons were then discussed. It was noted that Staplehurst Parish Council (SPC) would have to maintain an asset that could revert back to MBC after fairly minimal notice. However, parking was a critical issue for Staplehurst and the advantage for MBC is that they would save costs by no longer having to maintain it.

It was recommended that the matter was still worth pursuing.

Agenda item 3: Surrenden Field

The Group noted that there will be a meeting with MBC on the 28 October 2013 and recommended that SPC pursued the idea of taking over the freehold.

Agenda item 4: Grass Cutting at Surrenden Field

The Group recommended that the proposal from Landscape Services be accepted. This would cover 16 cuts of the field at £589.39 and 16 cuts of the fence line at £265 .71. This represented a 3% increase.

Agenda item 5: Jubilee Field Grass Cutting

The Group recommended that the proposal from the Jubilee Field Management Committee be accepted; It was noted that there was no increase over the current year.

Agenda item 6: Provision of Smoke Alarms at Jubilee Field

This follows the annual fire inspection at the Jubilee Field Pavilion which the Parish Council owns. The quote is for the installation and purchase of three smoke detectors and amounts to £250 plus VAT. The Group recommended this to be approved.

Agenda item 7 and Agenda item 9: Breakdown of 2013/14 Expenditure in new format, Parish Services Scheme and Precept for 2014/15

The new breakdown was noted and considered to be much clearer. The Group recommended that this could be put into the public domain.

A request had come from MBC for Parishes to sign off the Parish Services Scheme for 2013/14. It was noted that the Chairman had attended a meeting with MBC as part of a KALC team. Some concerns had been raised and these had all been satisfactorily dealt with and it was recommended that the letter from MBC could be signed as an indication that agreement had been reached.

The Group then took a first look at the budget and the possible effect on the Precept for 2014/15. It was noted that the initial calculation was over £10,000 higher but this should reduce significantly once the Parish Services Scheme and the Government Support Grant are taken into account. It could even lead to a lower Precept requirement. However, it was noted that reserves had been reduced in the current budget and taking a reasonably prudent approach these should be replenished by possibly as much as £10,000. It was recognised that a lot more work needed to be done but given the need to build up reserves an increase of around 10% might seem to be appropriate.

Agenda item 8: Audit Issues

We have had a clear bill of health from the Audit Commission and no concerns have been raised by our Internal Auditor.

Agenda item 10: Any Other Business

There were two items discussed. These were deferred recommendations resulting from the recent meeting with Eric Hotson and the results of the Parish Street Lights

Survey.

The Street Lights Survey followed Kent County Council's Street Lights' initiative. It was noted that the recommendations contained items that needed urgent attention. The Group then agreed a possible way forward and this will be presented to the Parish Council for a final decision.

The following items emanating from the discussions with Eric Hotson were also discussed:

- Bus services: Action: write to the Regional Transport Commission.
- Reinstatement of cats' eyes: Action: pursue with Kent Highways.
- Land at Chestnut Avenue: Action: pursue matter with Croudace Homes.
- Parking at Bell Lane: Action: Parish Council to consider installing no parking signs.
- Parking at Church Hill. All agreed that this should be discouraged. Action: SPC to raise the matter with MBC.

All the actions recommended above will be presented to the Parish Council for a final decision.

John Perry
October 2013