

STAPLEHURST

PARISH COUNCIL



www.staplehurst-pc.uk

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HIGHLIGHTS OF THE YEAR

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT



Hello everyone and welcome to our Parish Council annual report.

I think it is fair to say the last year has been one of the craziest in all of our lives and, at the time, of writing we are still in the middle of a global pandemic.

Looking back at the last year, I am immensely proud of the way our Parish Council, businesses and residents of Staplehurst have conducted ourselves. As a community, we have done each other proud!

The Parish Council were very quickly organised so that parish meetings could continue online and our services to the community were not disrupted in any way. A huge amount of credit goes to our staff, including retired Clerk Mick Westwood, for this achievement. On top of that, we managed to initiate help and assistance for residents to ensure that no one in our community would be left to struggle during the Covid pandemic. Sterling work from so many volunteers and local businesses helped to make this all possible, and we still plan to celebrate the amazing work everyone has done, as soon as we are able.

Significant and lasting improvements to the village are clear and visible. Behind the scenes, a huge amount of work is ongoing in relation to planning for the future, improvements to infrastructure such as drainage and our road network, yet still keeping our village feel. Plans are also in process for new exciting facilities for our community.

The completion of the new supermarket is a credit to everyone who has been involved. However, the Parish Council does not forget all our existing shops, that have served us so well for so many years, and we hope you

join the Council in continuing to support them all in the future.

Personally, I have enjoyed being able to work with our community groups to help improve these facilities for all the residents who use them.

Updated modern security arrangements in our village are being implemented as I write. As a council, we continue to engage with the Police and relevant authorities to work towards making Staplehurst a safer place.

The way the Parish Council has managed the parish finances in the last year is a real credit to our staff and councillors, who are fully aware of how difficult this period of time has been for many of our residents. Subsequently, we were very pleased that we managed to avoid raising the parish precept this year.

Many thanks must also go to our Borough Councillors & County Councillor who continue to offer unstinting support.

In conclusion, I am delighted the Parish Council has been able to lead the way for our village in the last year, I feel that the spirit that we are creating as a community can only lead to a brighter and better future for Staplehurst. I sincerely hope my colleagues have the confidence in me to continue to lead us towards these goals.

Thank you all for your wonderful support!

Paddy Riordan

cllr.paddyriordan@staplehurst-pc.uk



Find out the dates for Parish Council meetings. Please, scan this code:



DATE FOR YOUR DIARY
VILLAGE CLEAN UP

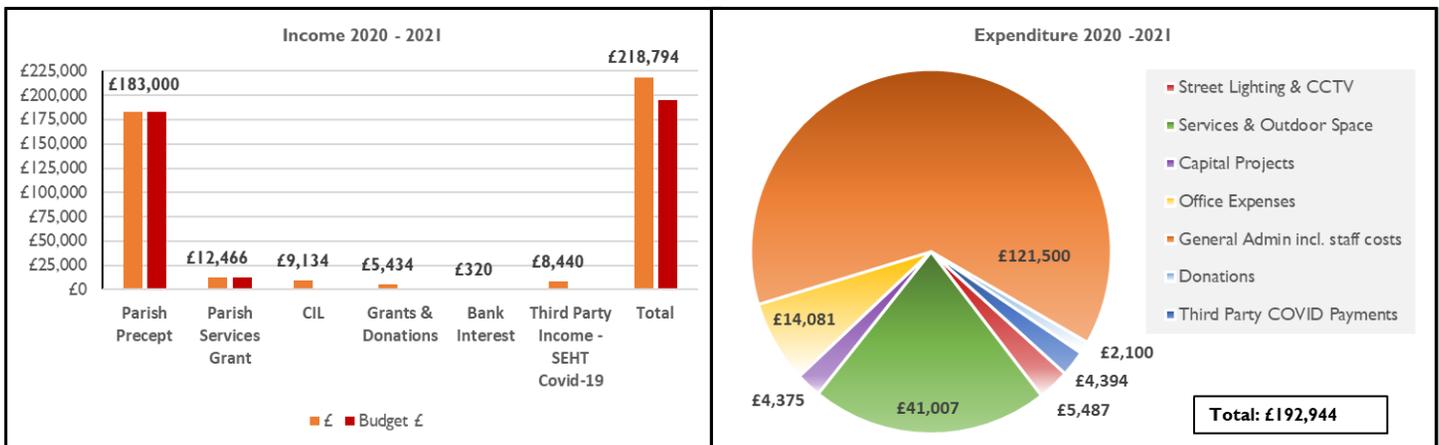
18th September
10am until noon
Meet at the Youth Club

MONEY MATTERS

The Parish Council receives income through the Precept; an annual sum of money collected with the Council Tax by Maidstone Borough Council. In addition, income is received from County and Borough Council grants, local business donations and developer contributions. Exceptional grants were also received this year by the SEHT Covid-19 team to assist with the pandemic. Details of the income and expenditure for 2020-2021 are shown below.

The precept for 2021/22 is £194,191 which equates to £73.79 pa for a Band D property. This remains at the same level as 2020/21. Following a difficult financial year for many, due to the pandemic, Councillors did not wish to increase the precept for residents, which has been achieved through prudent budgeting. The precept takes account of all the costs incurred in running and improving the Council's services and assets, as well as a number of new projects planned for the coming year. Income is broken down into precept, MBC parish services grant towards Bell Lane toilets and open space maintenance, CIL contributions from developers, KCC grants and donations from local business and grants received by the SEHT Covid-19 team.

The addition of CIL funds, grants and donations has assisted the Council in ending the year under budget. Expenditure for the year was as expected with some budget categories incurring overspends and other underspends, mainly influenced by the pandemic. A small sum has been carried forward to settle committed funds for projects that did not complete within the financial year and the balance has been added to the general fund for any unbudgeted or unforeseen emergencies that may occur. This has facilitated in keeping the precept at the same level as 2020/21.



Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972 enables parish councils to spend up to the product of £8.32 per elector for the benefit of people in the area and on activities or projects not specifically authorised by other powers. Electoral Roll stood at 4,976, thereby resulting in a limit of £41,400.32. The Council spent £2,100.00 on donations:

Organisation	Amount	Description
Staplehurst Merit Awards	£250	Community volunteer awards
Kent Surrey Sussex Air Ambulance	£100	In memory of ex-Cllr Manning
Royal British Legion	£100	Poppy Appeal
Friends of Five Acre Wood School	£250	'Buy a Brick' campaign
Space 2 Be Me	£250	Supporting families with disabled children
Medway Valley Countryside Partnership	£50	Supporting Kent's landscapes & wildlife
All Saints Staplehurst PCC	£75	Parish Magazine
Maidstone & Weald Samaritans	£100	Emotional support for those struggling to cope
Involve Kent Ltd	£75	Health and Wellbeing Charity
Kenward Trust	£100	Supporting people affected by substance abuse
Maidstone Citizens Advice Bureau	£300	Confidential advice service
Community Centre for Debt Advice Staplehurst	£200	Free face-to-face debt advice service
Kent Surrey Sussex Air Ambulance	£250	Emergency medical services
Total donations	£2,100	

OUR COUNCILLORS

Cllr. Colin Bowden cllr.colinbowden@staplehurst-pc.uk



My main activities this year have included dealing with drainage and sewerage issues on the new developments. Following meetings with our MP Helen Grant and the CEO of Southern Water, Southern

Water are now carrying out a full surface water survey of Staplehurst in order to resolve our long-standing problems with flooding and surcharging of sewers. I am also an active member of the Planning Committee and other groups including the Community Enhancement Group, Employment Group, Finance and Strategy Group and the Neighbourhood Plan Review Group.

It has been a challenging year but we have got through the worst and can look forward to a brighter future. We have a new Clerk and a number of new councillors with whom I am looking forward to working with to make Staplehurst a pleasant place to live.

Cllr. Joan Buller BEM cllr.joanbuller@staplehurst-pc.uk



I have now continued my work for the Parish Council for 38 years. I am a member of the Parish Council Planning Committee, Finance and Strategy Group, Employment Group, Neighbourhood Plan Review Group, Road Safety Group and

Speedwatch Team.

I have been very busy helping with planning applications, including writing many of the Council's submissions when we send applications to Maidstone Borough Planning Committee. I was also the lead councillor for the interviews to appoint a new Parish Clerk.

In addition, I took on a major role in writing the Parish Council's response to the consultation on the MBC Local Plan Review, especially regarding the latest 'Call for Sites.' I am also part of the team liaising with Play Place and we hope to have a summer playscheme this coming summer. As part of the Neighbourhood Plan Review Group, I am studying the MBC Local Plan potential policy changes, especially in the light of responding to planning applications and the future review of our plan.

Cllr. Jose Castro cllr.josecastro@staplehurst-pc.uk



During his year, I have been proud to lead the coordination of the COVID-19 division of the Staplehurst Emergency Help Team - organising a team of almost a hundred volunteers that have helped to make the village safe during the pandemic.

I also chair the Communications Group, leading the modernisation of the Village Update and this Annual Report and working on a new communications policy. I am also a member of the Greener Staplehurst Group, with more enthusiasm than knowledge. I joined the group because I firmly believe that we all must take steps to preserve the planet.

This aside, I regularly collaborate with the Payback Team in all their jobs around the village. I thoroughly enjoy working side by side with them, getting to know them and learning from the superb team management skills of Hazel, their coordinator.

Cllr. Bradley Gartan cllr.bradleygartan@staplehurst-pc.uk



I moved to Staplehurst 5 years ago from London. I live with my wife and 2 dogs. I was pleased and honoured to be co-opted onto the Parish Council last September. Although it's been challenging trying to undertake community projects

during a global pandemic.

I have been involved in the construction of the village workshop. We have used this to start building the new planters for the entrances to the village, and I have also tried to help out with the payback teams on Saturday mornings. I have also helped with the Christmas decorations at the parade.

I can see that the village is changing in the short time I have been here, with the building of the new Sainsbury's and the great work of this current Parish Council, and I look forward to being a part of the future of Staplehurst and working with such a great team.



Cllr. David George cldr.davidgeorge@staplehurst-pc.uk



I have been a resident of Staplehurst for the past 44 years. I joined the Parish Council in 2019 as I wanted to give something back to the village that has been my home, and in which my wife Valerie and I raised our two children.

I have spent the great majority of my life as an air conditioning engineer before retraining at Hadlow College and starting my own landscaping business. It seemed natural to start and become the Chair of the Greener Staplehurst Group; formed with the aim of increasing the variety of the flora and fauna within the village. Over the last year, I have spent a lot of my time planning, planting and organising the work that this group carries out and in negotiating tree planting and in organising the litter picking volunteers.

Cllr. Jon Grimwood cldr.jongrimwood@staplehurst-pc.uk



My wife and I have lived in Staplehurst all of our lives, and we have a two-year-old daughter. I am the director of a Tree Surgery company, and after volunteering both my time and equipment for various village projects, this sparked my enthusiasm

to push for more positive changes within the community. I am very hands on, having come from an engineering background, and helping out behind the scenes at each Staplehurst Family Fireworks event put me in touch with many contacts within the village. This has led to my involvement with other events and projects, such as The Parade Christmas lights, recycling/chipping Christmas Trees for local charities, and clearing vegetation at The Parade to name a few.

Cllr. Sam Lain-Rose cldr.samlain-rose@staplehurst-pc.uk



I have been a Councillor for 10 years. Covid -19 has expanded my work commitments so I have been able to devote less time to Council business this year. However, I remain passionate and

determined to support Staplehurst and attend meetings of the Council whenever I can. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the entire Parish Council workforce, Mick Westwood (who retired this year), Alison Smith (who joined us this year), Deborah Jenkins, Jean Terry, Paul Nyahwa and Marcus Nyahwa for their excellent unfaltering work, especially during the challenging times last year with a global pandemic.

Cllr. Simon McNeill cldr.simonmcneill@staplehurst-pc.uk



I was co-opted on to the Parish Council in June 2020. During this difficult year, it has been heartening to see the work of many on the Parish Council and the wider community, to come together and provide help and support for their neighbours. I have been proud to contribute to these efforts.

During the last year, I have become involved in the Community Enhancement Group, the Planning Committee and other groups in an effort to help wherever I can. I look forward to continuing to learn and hope to contribute more to the council and our community.

Cllr. Stuart McPhee cldr.stuartmcphee@staplehurst-pc.uk



I have recently been co-opted to join Staplehurst Parish Council. I am a married man with three children. I have been impressed by the changes in the village over the past few years, and I am really looking forward to helping drive further activities for the benefit of our local

community.

For work – I am a freelance Transformation Director, supervising and driving change. Making things happen. I am looking forward to the opportunity to be able to harness my energy for the benefit of the Parish Council. So far, I have joined the Communications Group and expect to join other groups soon. My wife and I are interested in the local community and have looked for ways to support.

Cllr. John Perry cldr.johnperry@staplehurst-pc.uk



I am a former Chairman of the Parish Council. Married, with three sons and four grandchildren. I have a background in advising various governments on funding I am an active member of several groups:

Finance and Strategy, Employment, Community Enhancement, Churchyard Liaison, Headcorn Aerodrome Consultative Group and the Neighbourhood Plan Review Group. I am also a Trustee of the Youth Club and the Jubilee Field Management Committee.

I am a keen supporter of the Neighbourhood Plan and have campaigned against excessive housing development in the Parish. Maidstone Borough Council's housing target has increased significantly, and I am campaigning to ensure that any new housing developments are fairly dispersed and that the correct infrastructure is in place. In particular, I continue to campaign to ensure that our drainage systems are fit for purpose.

I would like to thank my fellow Borough Councillor Louise Brice for all the hard work on making Sainsbury's new store happen.



Cllr. Adele Sharp cllr.adelesharp@staplehurst-pc.uk



During this unusual and busy year, it has been a privilege to see ‘Staplehurst’ support their community, pull together and ‘carry on’ during these unusual times. Each little bit that we have done has made the difference to so many people. The work to transport residents to their vaccinations, donating to the community hub or making Staplehurst look attractive continues.

I am on a number of groups: trying to make the roads in Staplehurst safer (Road Safety Group), to have sociable amenities (Community Enhancement Group) and to plan for the future of the village (Staplehurst Neighbourhood Review Group).

As Chair of Planning, I have the honour of working with fellow councillors and making recommendations about proposed developments to MBC. It is a dedicated group that work hard to try and ensure the best results for everyone. I continue to also work as a full-time teacher and as a trustee of the Village Community Centre.

Cllr. Richard Smith cllr.richardsmith@staplehurst-pc.uk



I was co-opted to the Parish Council in April 2021. My wife and I moved to Staplehurst in August 2020 after 21 years in the North East.

We enjoy ballroom dancing and, as a result of the pandemic, we increased our walking and, earlier this year, started running “5K”

around the roads of the village.

It was these latter activities which prompted me to join the Greener Staplehurst Group, having become dismayed at the amount of littering around the roads and lanes of Staplehurst. In addition, I have prepared a new Litter Strategy for GSG to use during this year and to build on the excellent work already undertaken by the Parish Council. I really look forward to making Staplehurst a more sustainable and environmentally friendly place to live and work. My aim is to use my experience of running multinational companies to assist the Council and the stakeholders it represents to “get things done”.

Cllr. Peter Spearink cllr.peterspearink@staplehurst-pc.uk



I originally joined the Parish Council in 2007. I had a short break from 2018 until 2019 when I was re-elected. Throughout these years, I have hardly missed a meeting. During this most unusual and unpleasant year, and despite some significant health issues early on, I have managed to maintain

a steady amount of work both at meetings and at home. Pride of place must go to making the old air-raid shelter into a workshop. This will allow us to increase the amount of work a small group of councillors can do to further improve our village. I have continued to look after our Payback Team each Saturday when covid allowed. These days I have help from four other councillors as well. I have continued with my research on street names and war memorials in the parish. Recently, I have joined the Greener Staplehurst Group in addition to the other groups that I already belong to. I continue to maintain a 100% attendance at Full Council meetings.

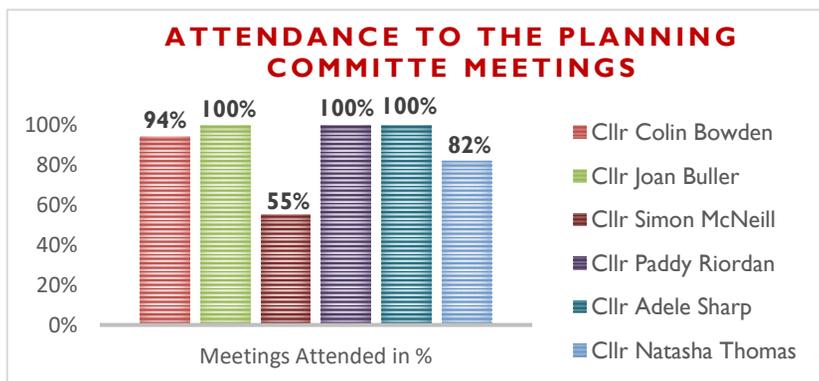
Cllr. Natasha Thomas

cllr.natashathomas@staplehurst-pc.uk



Natasha Thomas, supporting Greener Staplehurst Group and the Planning Committee. As with many in the village, this year has been stretching for me personally. Having three very small children at home for much of it, while trying to maintain a challenging full-time

career, has not left me with as much capacity as I’d hoped. I am so proud of what we continue to do for the village as a Parish Council, including progressing some key Greener Staplehurst initiatives and caring for key green spaces in the village. I continue to remain dedicated to learning more about the planning regulations and steps we can take to preserve the local look and feel of the village, planting projects from a supportive/administrative perspective, and getting my hands dirty and at every possible opportunity keeping a focus on applying for funding through programmes run in the public and private sector. Every day we are one step closer to a greener, even more beautiful village. Thank you for the support for our work from councillors, passionate villagers, and our generous local businesses.



CLERK'S REPORT

Well, what a strange and unusual year to join the Parish Council. Having joined in early November and just heading into another national lockdown, it would be fair to say it has been a challenging way to both start a new job and support the Council. I am extremely fortunate, however, to have had the opportunity for a handover with the outgoing Clerk, Mick Westwood, who not only left a well-oiled ship, but has been extremely generous with his time and support to help me bed in. I express my deep thanks to him and the team for making the transition as easy as it could be under the circumstances.

Once Lockdown hit, the team raced into action, becoming one of the first local parish councils in Kent to set up remote working and to put in place the tools to enable the Council to do so. Of course, sadly, due to the pandemic many of the normal community-based Council events were cancelled last year, but it's great to be working together again to bring back many of the activities such as our Summer Play Scheme, the BioBlitz event and the Village Clean ups to name but a few, with more projects coming on line every week, so watch this space.

Councillors and the office team have worked hard this year to and engage more with our residents, through our website and social media platforms. We look forward to developing ways of sharing valuable local and Parish Council information and seeking both your input and ideas.

Over the last six months, I have spoken to many of you on the phone on a vast array of issues, from planning matters to inappropriate parking and support with flooding issues to trying to find a home for a donated drum kit! The life of the Clerk and the office team is never dull. I was delighted to be able to assist the health centre with transport co-ordination for some of our elderly and more vulnerable residents. As we move into the summer, with fewer restrictions, we hope to be able to open the office again, giving myself and the team the opportunity to meet more of you and to continue to provide the valued support of the Parish Council.

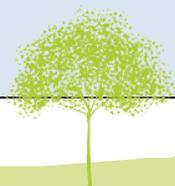
Alison Smith, Parish Clerk

PERSONNEL

Proper Officer / Clerk	Alison Smith	Parish Council Office Village Centre, High Street Staplehurst, TN12 0BJ 01580 891761 Opening hours: 9.00 – 13.00 Monday - Thursday
Deputy Clerk / Responsible Finance Officer	Deborah Jenkins	
Parish Support Officer	Jean Terry	
Caretaker	Paul Nyahwa	
Chairman of Council	Cllr. Paddy Riordan	cllr.paddyriordan@staplehurst-pc.uk
Vice-Chairman of Council	Cllr. John Perry	cllr.johnperry@staplehurst-pc.uk
Chairman of Planning	Cllr. Adele Sharp	cllr.adelesharp@staplehurst-pc.uk

SERVICES AND ACTIVITIES

PARISH COUNCIL	MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL	KENT COUNTY COUNCIL
Statutory consultee for planning applications Other responsibilities include management of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open spaces, including: Jubilee Field and Skatepark, Surrenden Playing Field, Wimpey Field Nature Reserve • Some public footpaths • Benches and litter bins • Four bus shelters • Public Toilets at Bell Lane • 14 various planters around the village • 13 street lights • Christmas motifs on the street lights • 10 extra salt bins • CCTV on 4 local sites 	Wider responsibilities, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principal decision-making authority for Planning applications and building control • Fly tipping, abandoned vehicles, dead animals, graffiti, dog mess and litter • Remaining bus shelters • Anti-social behaviour • Refuse, recycling and street cleaning • Illegal parking, parking control, fines • Hedge cutting - public pathways and roads 	Many responsibilities, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roads, highways, street furniture, potholes • Road safety & speed control • Road works & closures • Trading Standards • Majority of street lighting • Majority of salt/grit bins • Library Services • Public rights of way • Highways: drainage, culverts, ditch clearing and enforcement of riparian landowner's responsibilities



PARISH ACTIVITIES

Community Enhancement Group

Contact: Cllr Adele Sharp

The aim of this group is self-explanatory. We have a number of little projects on the go at the moment.

The Surrenden Field will soon be getting a new path from the pavilion, past the play area to the Thatcher Road entrance and a WWI commemorative bench at that end as well. We also have ideas about ongoing improvements to the pavilion at Surrenden Field, with a view to maybe providing refreshments in the future. We are working towards reopening the disabled toilet next to the library, repainting and lobbying KCC to reopen the library. Some councillors have already offered to volunteer to help with this.

We have retained the now defunct red telephone kiosk and just need to decide how best to make good use of it. Ideas so far have been for a plant and seed exchange, but we'd love to hear your ideas! Keep an eye on our Facebook page, where you can offer your thoughts. We have also been looking into adult outdoor exercise facilities, similar to those on the Redrow development. To date our plans to link the exercise equipment to the local electricity supply, so all our keen exercisers can supply the local grid, have been rejected, but you never know.



Communications Group

Contact: Cllr Jose Castro

The Communications Group has two main roles: to structure the way the Parish Council interacts with the residents, and to act as the voice of the Parish Council.

For the first, the group has been working hard this year developing a communications strategy in order to have a common approach as a group. For the latter role, we have been busy adding new sections to the Village Update to make it even more interesting, informative and reader-friendly. We have included new sections; explaining the names of the new streets, Parish Council news from the past; have written articles that would not only inform but also describe

events and services; or given a voice to other groups. We have also modernised the format of the Annual Report.

One of our main aims this year has been to focus on increasing the engagement with the residents online: Including making good use of the Parish Council website, producing and distributing the chairman's video report, and operating different social media accounts. We are now on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

Despite COVID and lockdowns, we managed to distribute the Village Update to every household. Only with the last issue did we resort to promoting the digital version and distribute a few paper copies through the main businesses in the village. We have many plans; one of them is to rewrite and expand considerably the entry for Staplehurst in Wikipedia with the help of different groups and knowledgeable residents.



Planning Committee

Contact: Cllr Adele Sharp

This Group reviews all planning applications received via MBC and submits recommendations and comments on individual applications as a formal consultee. We remain busy with planning applications that continue to come in at a steady rate. Our biggest workload comes from the large



estate developments. There is a lot of work that goes on trying to ensure that current and new residents get the best possible outcome about the things that are so important to residents, such as water / sewage, access and children's facilities.

Many residents in lockdown have opted to improve their current abode rather than move. We have seen an increase in applicants considering green designs, permeable drives, hedgehog access, water collection and thoughtful attention to the impact a development will have on neighbours, which is positive to see. Please do make sure you use the Maidstone Borough Council planning portal to look at planning applications. You can then comment about whether you approve of the plans or think they should be rejected/amended. Remember, MBC planning like hearing your opinions. If you are suffering from the Covid-19 sleeplessness, I can recommend the Maidstone Local Plan to become acquainted with their ideas. Of course, our Staplehurst Neighbourhood plan is far more interesting and hopefully less likely to make you snooze!



Community Speed Watch

Contact: [Malcolm Buller](#)

The aim of this group is to reduce vehicle speeds through our village. Since 2006, Staplehurst Parish Council has been at the forefront in attempts to educate motorists passing through our village to observe the speed limits, by providing the monitoring equipment. Volunteers are police-trained to use it and record the details of offending vehicles. For the last few years, the scheme has operated throughout the county and the police computer system correlates the information and generates letters of advice to those offending more than once or at high speeds.

Due to the pandemic, Staplehurst Speed Watch has only deployed on ten occasions since April 2020 and only one site has been allowed - in Station Road. Thanks go to the two pairs of volunteers who managed those in trying circumstances. The details of 186 vehicles were recorded for travelling in excess of 34mph towards the traffic lights. This generated 17 letters and prompted a uniformed officer to visit this site, stop and issue notices to 3 other motorists. Speed Watch can only be operated at police approved sites by trained volunteers. Show your interest by following the links from the Kent Police website and CSW. Once safety-trained on-line you will be given roadside training and be ready to help make the roads of Staplehurst safer. The more volunteers we have the more places can be covered more often. We need you to give a little time to help.



Employment Group

Contact: [Cllr Paddy Riordan](#)

The employment Group oversee all the activities in relation to our Parish Council employees. The Group have had a very busy year, during which we have had to obtain the services of a new Parish Clerk to replace Mick Westwood who had been such a mainstay of the Council for over eight years. I am delighted to say that, after a detailed interview process, our new Parish Clerk, Alison Smith, is fully engaged in the position.

The group had to review safe working practices for our employees, particularly in relation to Covid 19 requirements. The Parish Council have provided the means for our staff to work from home or, when needed, work in a safe environment at the parish office.

Despite COVID-19 challenges, the parish office team have continued to manage all the office and Parish Council activities without any issues.

Our parish caretaker has continued to carry out his responsibilities throughout the recent lockdown. We are very pleased to see that he is well on the mend after his recent injury. I think it is a credit to the employment group members, staff and councillors, that the Parish Council have continued to operate throughout the pandemic, virtually without a hiccup in the last year. Well done everyone!



Finance and Strategy

Contact: [Cllr Paddy Riordan](#)

The finance and strategy group carry out important work behind the scenes at the Parish Council, reviewing all financial matters and considering longer term strategic issues. In this difficult financial year, the Parish Council have still managed our finances within budget. It was very important to the group to advise Council that we did not wish to raise the

parish precept this year, which is the Parish Council part of residents' Council Tax. We recognised it has been a very difficult year for so many of our residents and local businesses. We regularly review all financial regulations, controls and procedures to ensure that the Council is managed with appropriate due diligence, prudence and decisions are financially sound. Various spending items are discussed regularly by the group to support important improvements and maintenance to the village;

giving due consideration wherever possible without dipping into Council reserves.

The group, supported by the information and hard work provided to us by our office staff, have formulated a rigorous budget for the coming year, which is positive in order for parish services to be maintained and improved, but assuring astute financial management at all times.

Staplehurst Youth Club

Contact: [Paul Kelly](#)

Up until the end of March 2020 the club had been very well attended, predominantly by the slightly older 14-17yrs group members. These members made full use of the club facilities available, many of which had been upgraded with grants and we again extend our thanks to Staplehurst Events Committee and Ken Collins, together with Staplehurst Parish Council who had funded the Youth Workers.

As the months rolled on and Youth Clubs were not permitted to open, the Trustees agreed that the 2020/21 Youth Worker funding awarded by SPC was to be returned

As a Charity, the Youth Club did donate one quarter of these funds in April 2020 to the Staplehurst Monarchs, to assist in their shortfall for repair following a theft issue. Especially as 'outside' youth sport activity was looking possible in the near future.

As we move into 2021 with Covid-19 restrictions gradually easing, we hope to be able to welcome back the Village 'Bridge Club' and 'The Men's Shed' along when possible, a new cohort of young people to the Youth Club.



Greener Staplehurst Group

The Greener Staplehurst Group, comprised of councillors and interested residents, was formed towards the end of 2019 with the aim of playing a small but vital role supporting the planet's flora and fauna while enhancing the appearance of our village. Towards this end we will also be making a concerted effort to tackle the growing litter problem. We have made a great start!

The village shopping centre now has eight wooden planters of various sizes, which will continue to be kept fully planted throughout the seasons. In the same area, several species of decorative shrubs have been planted and a communal herb bed created for the residents' use. Additional planters



Contact: Cllr David George

have been built by group members and are situated under the gateway signs. Elsewhere, bulbs, plugs, plants and seed have been sown in the mixed bed situated between High Street and Chestnut Avenue and wildflower beds at the entrance to the Jubilee Fields and at the end of Jeffrey Close.

Our future plans include increasing tree coverage which will benefit our residents, the local wildlife and ultimately our planet.

Additionally, in the next few months we will be tackling the local litter problem which blights so much of our lovely countryside, and money has been set aside specifically for this purpose. I hope that you will be taking your part in this endeavour too!

Jubilee Field Management Committee - JFMC Contact: Cllr Paddy Riordan



This Group manages all aspects of Jubilee field usage and maintenance. A lot of work has gone on to manage issues such as deep cleaning of showers and communal areas, general maintenance and having to

manage some of the antisocial behaviour that has taken place at the facility. The normal football related activities have been very restricted due to COVID 19.

The JFMC are pleased to have been able to support the Monarchs junior club and the men's football club, with financial contributions and removing all rental charges. The men's club have had to manage and maintain their fence, which has unfortunately had panels damaged and stolen.



Some incredibly positive items which I am pleased to be able to report on are:

Obtaining over £25,000 in various forms of funding during the last year. These funds will be injected directly back into the facility to make improvements and to assist with the day-to-day running of our sports field. The Parish Council are also making maintenance improvements to the skate park.

An all-weather sports pitch is a big project that I would like to drive forward this year. Section 106 funding from recent developments in the village may be used towards this project. A detailed management plan and project management process is currently being formulated.

Also, following my involvement through the Parish Council with the Sainsbury's supermarket project in the village, their contractors - Base Build - offered to carry out a complete makeover of the car park. This has been completed and I consider it to be a major box ticked!

Churchyard Liaison Group Contact: Cllr John Perry

The Parish Council funds the maintenance of the churchyard, including grass cutting, tree work and hedges. We must avoid the churchyard being closed to new burials and losing its traditional atmosphere. The work programme has continued despite COVID-19 and issues are discussed with representatives of the Parochial Church Council. Work has successfully been carried out by specialised contractors and volunteers from All Saints Church. Community Payback teams have also provided help.



Road Safety Group

Contact: Adele Sharp



We are a small but busy group, generally trying to improve the safety of the roads around Staplehurst. We slowly but steadily contact the appropriate people at MBC or KCC and with the support of County Councillor Hotson, chip away at the numerous little issues that are a cause of concern.

We have steered developers away from chicanes all over Staplehurst but encouraged crossings and other safety measures. We have part of the long overdue Highways Improvement Plan being implemented on the hill currently and are also working on getting a crossing at the quarter.

We continue to assess pavements and propose where we think dropped curbs should be or overgrown hedges that need cutting back. We have some residents on scooters who help keep us on our toes over these issues!

We were not able to persuade the powers that be to provide a bus layby beside Sainsbury's, but a lot of tweaks were made to the original layout due to recommendations made. It may not be perfect, but hopefully it will be safe.

The Men's Shed

Contact: **Richard James** (acting leader)

Staplehurst "Men's Shed" is a place where men, mostly aged between 50 and 85 from Staplehurst and surrounding villages, can come together to socialise, play pool, scrabble, share ideas and skills, participate on practical projects and make new friends. Tea, coffee, soft drinks and biscuits are provided. Normally meeting on Thursday mornings at Staplehurst Youth Club Hut, next to the Village Centre building. During lockdown, we have had weekly Zoom Calls with most members attending on some occasions, catering for those who have the technology as well as those with just a telephone.

Very sadly and unexpectedly, the leader of the Staplehurst Shed, Nigel Sheeran, died recently. Nigel led with great passion and commitment developing the Shed from its very early days with a membership of 5 to over 20 today.

Meetings and community projects will resume when permitted.



The Payback Team

Contact: **Cllr Peter Spearink**

Community Payback is a requirement of a Community Order imposed by the Court whereby offenders (service users) "pay back" the community for their crimes. Like everything else this has been a strange year for our Community Payback team. We started the last year, just before lockdown, and did manage to get some major work done on the Jubilee Field and some ditch clearing behind Bathurst Road. The CP team particularly enjoyed working on an elderly lady's front garden. She had had a double hip replacement and was unable to do anything herself. They managed to help on the last two main planters and on the Christmas lights, but large-scale jobs are still hampered by COVID-19 restrictions. One big

job undertaken was painting the inside of the Scout Hut and a large amount of ground clearing. We also cleared all the ivy from the roof and walls of the old air raid shelter and helped to clear it out ready for a new user and have also assisted the Greener Group. The team from KSS CRC helped on the village clean ups, as well as numerous other small jobs. We are hoping to have them back in force in time to help paint the library which is the next big job.

Occasionally we get someone who stands out from the crowd and although we are not allowed to give them a reference, we do send them a letter of thanks. No report on the team is complete without mentioning their leader and our friend Hazel. Her leadership is undeniably what gets the best out of the CP team, and such a hard worker who leads by example.

The Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan Review Group

Contact: **Margaret Arger**

The purpose of this group is self-explanatory. Group membership includes both local residents and Parish Councillors and during this difficult time has been meeting via Zoom, hosted by the Chairman of the Parish Council. The group has met regularly with continued commitment on highlighting the importance of all planning applications being judged within the context of the Neighbourhood Plan and how this relates to the current MBC Local Plan. Amendments have been made but any major changes

would result in a further referendum. The group members have been looking at other local Neighbourhood Plans of Marden, Cranbrook, Sissinghurst, Goudhurst and Hawkhurst as to how ours can be improved and made stronger. Infrastructure and in particular environmental issues affecting Staplehurst are seen as highly important additions. The Government's White Paper on Planning for the Future and the proposed revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) are creating further work and discussions for the group. The Neighbourhood Plan is a living document for the future. I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the group members for their continued hard work and their ongoing commitment.



Village Centre *Contact: Cllr Adele Sharp*

This Group manage the activities in and around the Village Centre. We have not been as busy as usual due to Covid-19, but we have been pleased to host the community hub, which has helped several people get through these uncertain times. The Under Five Playgroup and Fun Train have been able to run as per government guidelines and we look forward to welcoming back many of the usual events we host. We have the Staplehurst Food with Kent Artisan Crafts market and look forward to many more community events. We have had



the local elections on the 6th May, all with distance restrictions of course. If everything goes according to plan, we will have more events in the year as everything reopens.

There has also been the chance to carry out some maintenance work as well – not a lot to see at the

front as it is mostly mundane things like roofs, gutters and water – not very exciting but essential. The wet weather and lockdown prevented the final clear up that the community payback team began, clearing brambles on the site. With them and the help of a couple of the trustees, bulbs were planted along the front which are currently blooming nicely. Hopefully, things will be back to normal for us to be able to hold our AGM later in the year, not remotely like last year, but in person. See you there!

Staplehurst Emergency Help Team - COVID Division

Contact: Cllr Jose Castro

The COVID-19 division of Staplehurst Emergency Help Team, created for this pandemic, has been one of these success stories that from time to time happen. What a year this one has been! We have tried our best to turn a negative into a positive. The calamity that the pandemic has brought upon the whole world has turned into an opportunity for us to join as a community and for many wonderful human beings to give the best of themselves, and altruistically help others. Over 100 volunteers have put two services in place: One large group providing assistance to the most vulnerable in Staplehurst and beyond by doing their shopping, collecting their prescriptions, providing conversation and reassurance, keeping an eye



on vulnerable residents, being a friendly face and more.

Another group operates a Community Hub to provide for all those that are suffering due to the pandemic. Thousands of emails and messages, phone calls and hundreds of hours invested. We estimate that 7% of the residents of Staplehurst have benefitted directly from this effort, which has not passed unnoticed in various forums at Borough and County level. The team currently continues to operate opening the hub once a week and assisting approximately 30 of our most treasured residents. The volunteers you see accompanying these words are just a

small representation of those that helped and are still helping. Some of the real and unsung local heroes in our village.

Staplehurst Emergency Help Team *Contact: Andrew Watson*

This aim of this Group is to plan for how to deal with a local emergency. No news is good news. For year ending March '21 there is nothing to report – no emergency occurred which required the Emergency Help Team's involvement. The 2019-20 AGM was postponed ahead of the lockdown in March '20, and we have not met since. So, on behalf of all volunteers who have been obliged to isolate, I would like to thank the Covid-Support Team for standing in for us, for serving the village so tirelessly during the Covid crisis.



SEHT's next event is planned for Saturday 25th September in the Free Church (10-midday). Everyone will be welcome. Its purpose is to familiarise volunteers in setting up and running a shelter, providing warmth and sustenance for (possibly) hundreds of people not able to reach their homes – perhaps a ruptured gas main has forced the Emergency Services to evacuate an area for several hours.

Emergencies do happen. So, please, come along to see what happens – it's best to know how you could help in such an event. Also, this will be a first: the shelter will be run according to the latest post-Covid guidelines.



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