

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF STAPLEHURST PARISH COUNCIL  
Virtual Meeting via Zoom video-conference  
Monday 9<sup>th</sup> November 2020 at 7.00p.m.

**PRESENT:** Councillors Bowden, Buller, Castro, Forward, Gartan, George, Lain-Rose (until the point indicated in the minutes), McNeill, Miller, Perry (from the point indicated in the minutes), Rawlinson, Sharp, Spearink and Riordan who was in the Chair.  
Acting Clerk Mr MJ Westwood and Parish Clerk Designate Miss A Smith.

**APOLOGIES:** Councillors Perry (for part of the meeting due to borough council commitment) and Thomas whose apologies were accepted.

**COUNCILLOR DECLARATIONS** regarding items on the Agenda:

Changes to the Register of Interests – none declared.

Interests in Items on the Agenda – Councillors Buller, Forward and Riordan declared an interest in confidential item 2 (nominations for Staplehurst Merit Award) and said that they would not participate in the vote.

Requests for Dispensation – Councillors Buller, Forward and Riordan requested and were granted a dispensation to speak on confidential item 2 (nominations for Staplehurst Merit Award) in order to provide information to and answer questions from parish councillors. Dispensations to participate in this way were granted in accordance with Section 33(2)(e) of the Localism Act 2011.

**APPROVAL OF FULL COUNCIL MINUTES:** Proposed by Councillor Sharp, seconded by Councillor George, minute pages 1864-1868 of 19<sup>th</sup> October 2020 were APPROVED by Councillors, to be signed by Chairman Riordan and made available at <http://www.staplehurst-pc.uk/community/staplehurst-parish-council-13607/full-council/>. Councillors Lain-Rose and Rawlinson abstained.

### **FINANCE REPORTS**

1. Accounts for payment – for approval. Proposed by Councillor Sharp, seconded by Councillor Miller, the listed accounts for payment were APPROVED. Expenditure for the period 14<sup>th</sup> October to 3<sup>rd</sup> November totalled £14,444.92; income for the period was £8,316.32.

<u>Approved Payments 14th October - 3rd November 2020</u>	<b>Amount</b>
ACRK - Annual Subscription	105.00
HMRC - Tax & NI September	1,917.67
Clr Reimbursement re Community Payback Refreshments	17.64
Clr Reimbursement re Black Sacks Community Payback	8.42
B Hawkins - Chestnut Ave/A229 Hedge Cutting	195.00
JFMC - Maintenance Payment 2/2	1,250.00
Kent County Council - Load Testing re Xmas Motifs	1,518.00
KCS - Photocopy Rental Oct-Dec	151.48
Homeleigh Timber - Paint re Play Area Surrenden Field	23.98
Staff Reimbursement re Land Registry Fee	4.00
Payroll & Pension Costs October	5,615.91
Clr Reimbursement re Workbench Costs	11.60
Homeleigh Timber - Cable Ties	9.10
Homeleigh Timber - Padlock Surrenden Play Area	20.31
Forestry First Ltd - Surrenden Field Hedge Cutting	2,112.00
Forestry First Ltd - Chestnut Avenue/A229 Grass Cutting	720.00
Forestry First Ltd - Youth Club Mowing	384.00

Personnel Checks - DBS Check AS	43.99
Amazon - Coir Door Mat re Workshop	14.99
MBC - Council Tax Room 1 November	62.00
MBC - Council Tax Room 2 November	72.00
Lloyds Bank Charges - October	6.50
Arron Services Ltd - Hosted Exchange Service November	171.00
<b>TOTAL CURRENT ACCOUNT EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>14,434.59</b>
<b>TOTAL PETTY CASH EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>10.33</b>

2. Summation of Accounts – NOTED by Councillors and published at <https://www.staplehurst-pc.uk/community/staplehurst-parish-council-13607/financial-info/>.
3. Finance & Strategy Group Recommendations – The report of the meeting held on 26/10/20 was NOTED and published on the Parish Council website at <https://www.staplehurst-pc.uk/community/staplehurst-parish-council-13607/finance--strategic-planning-group/>.

Recommendations (for decision):

- 3.1. Jubilee Playing Field – Approval of plans for updated maintenance agreement (item 5 in report). The Acting Clerk reported that he had just received from solicitors a draft updated maintenance agreement, which he would share with parties involved in the field's facilities and activities. He advised that solicitors would need to do a small amount of additional work to conclude the agreement. Councillors AGREED to increase the budget for the work from £500 to £750.
- 3.2. Parish Council Standing Orders – approval of continuation of existing standing orders (item 7 in report). Proposed by Councillor Lain-Rose, seconded by Councillor Forward, it was RESOLVED to APPROVE the standing orders as submitted.
- 3.3. Tree Inspection – Approval of expenditure on a new survey of Parish Council-owned trees (item 10 in report). Proposed by Councillor George, seconded by Councillor Sharp, it was RESOLVED to APPROVE expenditure of £300 on a walk-over tree survey by GRS Arboricultural Consultant.
- 3.4. Contract Reviews and Payments – Approval of reviews and payments falling due in the coming quarter (item 12 in report). Proposed by Councillor Sharp, seconded by Councillor George, it was RESOLVED to APPROVE the following contract renewals and payments: Countrystyle Group re waste collection £702.00 p.a., Staplehurst Community Centre re lease of parish offices £4,200 p.a., RBL re Poppy Appeal Donation £100.00, Playplace Ltd re summer play scheme £2,000.00, Staplehurst PCC re donation towards Churchyard maintenance £7,583.00 p.a., Staplehurst Community Centre re Meeting Hall hire £957.00 p.a., annual subscriptions to the National Allotment Society £55.00, Kent Pond & Tree Warden £50.00 and Transport Accessibility Group £20.00, £18 for technical support to a member of NPRG to facilitate virtual meetings. Councillors deferred consideration of the Group's recommendation relating to Bell Lane toilets, pending further work by Community Enhancement Group on the possible provision of additional facilities in the village.

#### **CORRESPONDENCE & PARISH ISSUES** for decision or noting:

1. Cases of Hardship – Consideration of what help could be offered to alleviate local cases of hardship arising from Covid-19 issues. Councillors NOTED that there had been much discussion in the media about the response of the government to cases of hardship. Chairman Riordan commented that during the first lockdown the Parish Council had responded in a positive way by facilitating the work of the Emergency Help Team and Community Hub, which had been reactivated for the current second lockdown. He commented that the emergency help team had procured funding from central and local government grants.
2. Fitzgerald Close – Correspondence relating to siting a 'Lest we forget' figure adjacent to the Parish Council's commemorative bench (for decision). Proposed by Councillor Miller, seconded by Councillor George, it was RESOLVED to support the request to place a figure

adjacent to the commemorative bench. It was suggested that an airman would be appropriate because Sgt. Fitzgerald had served in the RAF.

3. Kent Association of Local Councils Annual General Meeting 28/11/20 – Notification of meeting and agenda: for discussion of meeting business and consideration of voting by Parish Council representatives (for comment and decision). Councillors NOTED the meeting agenda. Councillor Forward commented that: the proposed increase in membership subscription would have only a marginal impact on the Parish Council; the proposal from Swale Area Committee to seek measures to deal with littering from passing vehicles was worthy of support. Councillors asked the Acting Clerk to convey to KALC these views and, unless Councillor Perry were to be available, apologies that no members would be able to attend.
4. Maidstone Borough Local Plan Review – Update on status of the review and discussion of how the Parish Council will respond to the Regulation 18b consultation (Notes by Clerk and Cllr. Buller). Councillors discussed MBC's evaluation of sites submitted for possible inclusion in the review of the Local Plan and MBC's proposals for consultation on the approach that it planned to take. This discussion took place concurrently with a meeting of MBC's Strategic Planning & Infrastructure Committee, which was covering the same subject. Councillors NOTED that MBC had identified two preferred sites in Staplehurst for potential development: Lodge Road (78 units) and Home Farm (49 units). It was also NOTED that MBC's evaluation could be subject to change. Councillor Buller commented that the Parish Council had voiced opposition to any new development beyond what was included in the Neighbourhood Plan; however, Lodge Road was covered by the Neighbourhood Plan (policy H6) albeit for mixed use (residential and commercial); an essential deliverable would be a link road between Lodge Road and Hen & Duckhurst Farm; development at Home Farm would create more traffic at the Headcorn Road-A229 crossroads. Councillors commented that further development must bring benefits such as new infrastructure and allotments and the Parish Council should consider carefully what would be the priorities.
5. Station Road Bus Shelter – Proposal from Sainsbury's to replace the Parish Council-owned bus shelter on the eastern side of Station Road (for decision). Councillors NOTED that Sainsbury's had proposed a specification matching that of the MBC-owned bus shelter on the western side of Station Road. Councillors AGREED that it would make sense for the bus shelters to be held in common ownership. It was RESOLVED to propose to Sainsbury's and MBC that MBC take on responsibility for the new shelter on handover by Sainsbury's. It was further RESOLVED to ask that the shelter be equipped with side panels.
6. Wimpey Field Benches – To consider whether to retain or remove two picnic benches from Wimpey Field (for decision). After some discussion, proposed by Councillor Lain-Rose, seconded by Councillor Spearink, it was RESOLVED to leave the benches in situ and do as much as possible to secure them.

*At this point Councillor Lain-Rose gave apologies and left the meeting. Councillor Perry joined the meeting.*

#### **PARISH COUNCIL REPORTS** (from Committee/Groups/Office on specific issues or as regular update)

1. Clerk's Report – The Acting Clerk thanked the Parish Support Officer for all the work she had put into arrangements for a parade on Remembrance Sunday, which unfortunately could not take place due to lockdown restrictions; however, the occasion had been marked at The Parade. Councillor Forward commented on the poppies on the High Street's lamp columns and thanked the caretaker for their installation. The Acting Clerk reported that the Deputy Clerk had invested a lot of time in dealing with contractors and Kent Highways in preparation for the installation of the Christmas lights in the coming weeks. He also reported that she was seeking quotations for surface repair works at the skate park and Surrenden Field. Items for future expenditure: (i) the Surrenden Field CCTV recorder needs to be replaced – proposed by Chairman Riordan, seconded by Councillor Forward,

- Councillors APPROVED expenditure of £379.80 + VAT on the replacement; (ii) MBC have quoted a price of £961.25 to provide and install four signs at Ashdown's Walk and Douthreppont's Walk (higher than the initial estimate of £600 – Min1865); the Acting Clerk said he had sought an explanation which Councillors decided to await before making a decision. Works at Chestnut Avenue – BT Openreach wishes to lay a duct under Parish-Council owned land between High Street and Chestnut Avenue; noting that BT had agreed to make good any damage, Councillors AGREED to the request. The Acting Clerk welcomed Miss Alison Smith as new Parish Clerk and thanked councillors and the Parish Office team for their support over the years.
2. Written Reports on Committee, Group and Project activities - for decision or noting.
    - 2.1. Community Enhancement Group – Report of meeting 29/10/20: NOTED by Councillors and published on the Parish Council website at <https://www.staplehurst-pc.uk/community/staplehurst-parish-council-13607/community--leisure-group/>.
    - 2.2. Neighbourhood Plan Review Group – Report of meeting 14/10/20: NOTED by Councillors and published on the Parish Council website at <https://www.staplehurst-pc.uk/community/staplehurst-parish-council-13607/neighbourhood-plan-review-group/>.
  3. Oral Reports from Committee/Groups/Councillors – for information only.
    - 3.1 Community Payback – Councillor Spearink reported that in recent weeks there had been fewer members in the visiting Community Payback teams, which he had taken up with the central office. For the latest visit, the numbers had returned to the normal level.
    - 3.2 Workshop Facility at Village Centre - Councillor Spearink reported that work on setting up and fitting out the new workshop had been completed. Expenditure had amounted to £423.
    - 3.3 Chairman's Report – Oral report by Chairman Riordan. The Chairman welcomed new Parish Clerk Alison Smith and thanked the retiring Clerk Mick Westwood. Planning: the Parish Council had responded to the Planning White Paper; the Chairman had written to Helen Grant MP about the white paper and the Local Plan and he was seeking a meeting with her about drainage issues at Hen & Duckhurst Farm. Covid-19 Community Hub and Help Team: the hub would be opening between 11.00 and 13.00 on Wednesdays and was well stocked with food; the Chairman thanked Councillor Castro for organising the help team volunteers; the number of volunteers was equal to those identified as being in need, facilitating one-to-one matching. Workshop: the Chairman thanked Councillors Gartan and Spearink for setting up the workshop at the Village Centre. Community Payback: some good work has been done at the Village Centre and Bell Lane pond. Village Update: the Communications Group had sent the draft of the next issue to the design studio. Road Safety Group: the Group was following up with Kent Highways the improvements identified in the Parish Council's Highway Improvement Plan. Greener Staplehurst Group: it is liaising with local residents about work at Poyntell Pond. Surrenden Playing Field: Community Enhancement Group is investigating the scope to lay a new path, replace the pavilion and install adult gym equipment. Remembrance Sunday: a fitting ceremony had been held at The Parade; the Parish Council's wreath will be taken from the village sign to the memorial in All Saints Church.

*During the Chairman's report, councillors voted to suspend standing order 3.24 to facilitate the completion of business.*

- 3.4 Covid-19 Help Team – Councillor Castro reported that the team had contacted 64 residents who had received a number of support interventions during the first lockdown. Thirty residents required assistance this time and they have been individually matched with a like number of volunteers. The main area of need is for collection of prescriptions.

**REPORTS FROM OTHER COUNCILS, AGENCIES AND ORGANISATIONS** for noting: -

1. Borough Councillor's Report – Oral report by Councillor Perry. Councillor Perry had been attending the virtual meeting of MBC's Strategic Planning & Infrastructure Committee running concurrently with the Parish Council meeting. He commented that MBC was seeking to speed up the consultation process connected with the review of the Local Plan. He said that MBC's preferred approach involved two selected sites for Staplehurst, which he felt would be a good outcome after 31 sites were put forward. He said he was of the opinion that zero growth was not a realistic option. He cautioned that any developer could submit a planning application on a site, whether or not it were to be included in the Local Plan. Chairman Riordan thanked Councillor Perry for his work on behalf of Staplehurst.

**REPORTS FROM LOCAL COMMUNITY GROUPS** (written reports for noting)

No items.

**URGENT MATTERS** - at the discretion of the Chairman, information only items for noting or for decision at a future meeting.

None.

**SPECIAL MOTION & REPORTS**

1. To move that the public be excluded from items 2 and 3 due to their confidential nature. As no members of the public remained present, the motion to exclude was not moved.
2. To receive a report from Community Enhancement Group about nominations for the Staplehurst Merit Award. Councillors considered nominations arising from the Group's meeting of 29/10/20 and selected two award recipients (one junior, one adult). A public announcement will be made at a future date. *The Acting Clerk and Clerk Designate left the meeting at this point.*
3. To receive a report from Employment Group and consider its recommendations relating to staff remuneration. It was RESOLVED to APPROVE the recommendation of the Group relating to the level of staff remuneration in 2021-22.

Chairman.....

**PUBLIC FORUM:**

Before the meeting, County Councillor Hotson commented on a number of issues: his concerns about development proposals in the Maidstone Borough Local Plan Review and particularly in respect of highways infrastructure; increase in Covid-19 cases in Kent hospitals, although there is still capacity; discussions have been held about a Kent and Medway Infrastructure proposal; HM Government consultation on pavement parking (previously discussed by the Parish Council – Min1866), an issue which threw up challenges of displacement and enforcement.

Before the confidential items, a resident commented: there were large holes in the surface of Bell Lane Car Park, which need to be reported to MBC; at the A229/Church Green junction a wall damaged in an accident is still awaiting repair, which needs to be reported to Golding Homes. Borough Councillor Brice reported on the conclusion of MBC's Strategic Planning & Infrastructure Committee meeting which had approved proposals for consultation on the preferred approach to updating the Local Plan.

Proceedings finished at 9.30pm.