

**STAPLEHURST
ANNUAL PARISH
MEETING
5th MAY 2021**



LOCAL GROUP REPORTS

Staplehurst Bridge Club – Report 2021

The Bridge Club has been unable to meet since March 2020 due to the lockdown restrictions resulting from pandemic. Obviously, it is the wish of our members to return to playing face to face bridge as soon as we are able, but in the meantime many of us are keeping in practice by playing in the many on-line bridge platforms which have arisen.

We understand that the Youth Hut is available for us to use as soon as we are confident and comfortable that bridge can be played safely. As it is at the moment, we feel that the adaptations to the way we play would have to be fairly extensive, and some members may not feel so enjoyable.

However, it is hoped that we shall be able to restart our Friday evenings towards the end of the Summer/early Autumn, and we would welcome anybody who feels they would like to play our wonderful game.

We meet every Friday evening at 6.45pm in the Youth Hut which is located to the left of the Village Centre in the middle of Staplehurst.

If there are any queries or you would like further information, please contact Liz Mitchell (01580 713856) or Fred Livermore (01580 892095).

Community Centre for Debt Advice – March 2021

2020 was a very quiet year for the Community Centre for Debt Advice. We had our last face to face appointment with a client on 23rd March and then the first lockdown began. We moved laptops and basic equipment to homes and continued to support clients remotely. We only had one new client contact us during the year and there was very little communication from creditors. It seems likely that the significant reduction in chasing debts by creditors has given those in debt a temporary reprieve and so they are not seeking help in addressing their difficulties. We anticipate that as we come out of lockdown and things begin to return to normal, so there will be a rapid rise in the number of people seeking help and advice. In the meantime, we are putting our systems in order, ensuring policies are up to date and other essential tasks.

Our main highlight during 2020 was achieving a Debt Relief Order for one of our clients. This gentleman came to us in 2018 with significant debt and serious mental health problems. His total debt was so high that he was not eligible for a Debt Relief Order and bankruptcy was not appropriate. We managed to agree a payment plan whereby he was paying just £1 per month to his creditors. Just before the Covid crisis hit we urged his creditors to cancel his debt as he is unlikely to ever do paid work again. A couple of creditors agreed to cancel small debts. Then in July one creditor cancelled 2 substantial debts, bringing the total owing within the threshold of a Debt Relief Order. We were able to complete the necessary application and in October the order came into place. In October 2021 the debts will be finally cancelled and this client will be completely debt free. It has been such a privilege to walk this difficult path with such a vulnerable client.

Anyone needing help or support can contact the centre via phone or email, details below:

Phone 01580 893583

Email: debtadvice@ccdass.org.uk

Staplehurst Community Events Group 2021

Firstly, we would like to express our sadness at losing our dear friend Barrett Manning, at the end of last year. Barrett was instrumental in setting up the very first Staplehurst Carnival and Fete, way back in 1966, and after some years re-joined the committee, first as the Parish Council representative, but latterly as committee member. He had attended all our meetings, always gave good valuable advice and helped with all our events. He was a great asset to our group, and our village, and we will really miss him.

During 2020 our group held virtual meetings in order to keep abreast of Covid 19 developments, and how they would impact our events. Unfortunately, it quickly became clear we would not be able to bring any of our usual events to the village, due to this. However, a new person came on to our Committee, Katie Higgins, and she took responsibility for organising the Christmas tree and lights at the Parade, on our behalf.

In 2020 we were advised that the Parish Council were considering improvements to the pavilion on the Surrenden Field or the prospect of a new pavilion. We hope to have toilets installed to avoid the substantial cost of hiring them for every event, and are liaising with the Parish Council over the plans, although no decision has been made at this stage.

In 'normal' times, we would give groups/organisations in the village the opportunity to apply for funding from money that we have raised throughout the year. However, despite 2020 not being a 'normal' year we were able to make 2 donations. First to support the Friends of Staplehurst Health Centre Newsletters in 2021, and secondly to the McCabe group who made small Christmas hampers for those who would normally attend their lunch club.

At our virtual meetings, we have been discussing our hopes for events that we may be able to bring to the village this year, subject to Government guidelines. Whilst nothing can be set in stone, we are looking at the possibility of a Picnic in the Park at the beginning of August, a 5k/10k run in September, Stay Safe Staplehurst Exhibition in October, as well as a Christmas Fair and Santa's Sleigh, along with the Christmas tree and lights at the Parade. We are also considering the possibility of a Fun Fair as well as a Drive In Cinema. Even if we cannot bring all of these events to the village, we hope that we can bring some of them.

We have decided to change our current Staplehurst Community Events Group logo to show that it is not just about the fete but it includes many other events for our community. The new logo is at the design stage at the moment but we are sure it will better represent the Staplehurst Community Events Group.

We hope that this year allows us to bring our community together again.

Staplehurst Free Church 2020 – 2021

It would be fair to say that whilst the Covid19 pandemic has significantly affected us, it has not stopped us! At the start of the pandemic in March 2020, the church chose to stop all on site activities ahead of the national lockdown, in order to protect not only our own church attendees but also the wider community whom we serve through the many community-based activities we ran.

Sunday Services

Within two weeks of lockdown and with help purchasing licenses and broadcasting equipment from Kent Community Foundation, we started streaming our services online. Initially these were streamed privately via YouTube to our own members and contacts. Many people were able to be involved in preparing and delivering the broadcasts via video, and far more than previously! Between 50 and 80 people watched each week on YouTube, including many people not previously involved with SFC, but also family and friends across the country and internationally.

With the relaxation of lockdown rules in early autumn, in-person meetings became possible again and following extensive work by our Chair of Trustees on necessary risk assessments, it was decided that the Church building would reopen to enable up to 50 people to attend Sunday services in person, whilst maintaining social distancing and other Covid19 secure measures. For those not wishing or able to meet for corporate worship, the online broadcast service continued. With the second and third lockdowns the church services reverted to online only. However, in line with government guidance and whilst maintaining a Covid19 secure environment the church has started using the building for services again from Easter Sunday whilst still streaming the services.

Virtual Meetings

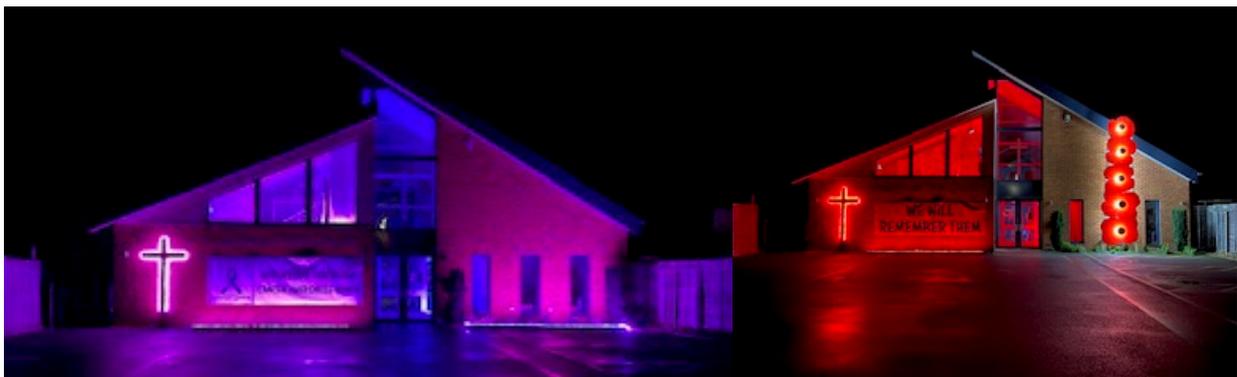
Throughout the past year the church has used technology and in particular Zoom, to run “in house” meetings online, enabling the church to continue to operate at both a spiritual and practical level. At the start of 2021 the church ran an **Alpha course online**. These sessions were attended by a mix of church and non-church individuals. The value of being online was evident in that contacts from further afield were able to join us, as were those who would find it hard to attend to in person due to home responsibilities.

Free Babels: New Mums Support Group

Although unable to run FreeBabels our hugely popular mother and toddler group throughout the pandemic, we have been able to set up and run a new support group for mums to be or Mums with non-mobile babies. This was set up in response to the social isolation experienced by many new Mums during lockdown which was being expressed through many comments on village social media. In line with government regulations the group is for maximum of 15 Mums at a time with their babies and adheres to the Covid19 secure environment requirements.

Community based activities and Church Displays

Although unable to utilise our church building in the usual way this last year, since the autumn the church has created **engaging 3 dimensional displays at the front of the church** to both identify with the community and publicise our various activities and events.

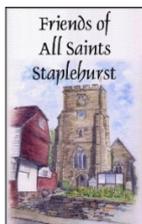




Within the constraints placed on us by the pandemic, we have endeavoured to provide suitable **socially distanced outdoor activities for the community's children.**

Throughout the last year the church has endeavoured to support the village community, whilst recognising the work done by the parish council and the Staplehurst Emergency Help Team. Our aim continues to be to communicate Jesus' love through the various means at our disposal, especially during what has been a difficult year for so many.

Maggie Martin (Church administrator)



Friends of All Saints Staplehurst 2021

The last year has been a challenge for charities and for The Friends this has been no different. Sadly, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Friends have not been able to hold any fundraising events for over a year and, as a result, our income has more than halved. At the time of writing, we have no future events planned either.

There is little doubt that our ability to provide ongoing grant support to All Saints Church will be significantly reduced without the income from our fundraising events and the support of the wider public those events generate.

We are incredibly grateful to our supportive members who, during 2020 and into 2021, not only continued to pay their subscriptions but also made some generous donations, some donors telling me that the donation was in respect of what they might have spent at an event.

As a committee, we have continued to meet over Zoom in both formal trustee meetings and socially with current and extended committee members. This has been great for our mental health. We paid the Church over £13,000 at the beginning of 2021 for maintenance.

Our 2020 AGM took place over Zoom as will this year's AGM on the 12th of May.

Several committee members have mentioned they wish to stand down, so at the AGM we will be looking for some new committee members. If you want to find out more about the work we do as a committee, please contact me. If you are a paid-up member you can stand for committee as a Trustee.

To raise funds by alternative means and to encourage the wider Staplehurst community to donate, we have set up a Friends donation page at <https://allsaintsstaplehurst.co.uk/friends-donations/> This went live in February 2021 to tie in with a Parish Magazine article and so far, has raised just over £100.

Membership is currently 95 and, as always, we are on the lookout for new members. Whilst welcoming one new member in the year, we also fondly remember those who sadly have died, Revd. Brian Barnes, Bernard Tipples and Beryl Lewcock, all staunch supporters of the Friends; may they rest in peace.

I would like to thank the Friends committee: - Honorary Treasurer Mary Shaw, Secretary Tony Norfolk, Maureen Brice, Sue Elwell, Janet Pink, Frank Page and Tony Henley. Alaine Summers and Ann Fulcher stood down from the committee at the 2020 AGM. We thank them for their hard work over many years spent on the committee.

The Committee are always pleased to receive suggestions for new events (when we return to those) or for merchandising ideas. We have a new Friends pen available, these proving very popular.

We thank everyone that has continued to support us through membership and donations over the last twelve months and an eventual return to fundraising events sometime in the future.

Andrew Brady, Chairman & Membership Secretary

Friends of All Saints Staplehurst – Registered Charity No. 1037964

Tel: 01580 891840 **Email:** friends@allsaintsstaplehurst.co.uk www.allsaintsstaplehurst.co.uk/friends

The Friends of Staplehurst Health Centre 2021

The Department of Health Covid-19 protocol has prevented normal patient access to the Health Centre for the past 12 months and this has affected the functioning of the Friends. No health information evenings have been held and it was not possible to hold our usual Christmas draw, the tickets for which in previous years were sold at the influenza vaccination clinics. The only activity has been the production of the Friends quarterly newsletter, the cost of which was met by the Community Events Group. We hope that in the coming months Covid-19 lockdown will cease and patients will be allowed entry to the health centre so that we can hold some more health information evenings. We shall continue to produce newsletters and endeavour to keep everyone informed on health matters. The clinical and administrative teams at the health centre have done a great job in maintaining such services as the protocol has permitted and our thanks must go to the Practice Manager and her team for their hard work on our behalf.

**Robin Oakley Secretary
and Treasurer**

Staplehurst Horticultural Society 2021

This could be the easiest report to write ever, as the Covid-19 pandemic has led to the banning of the essential elements of our activities, whether by way of closing venues or prohibiting of mass gatherings!

However, as Audrey Hepburn said, "To plant a garden is to believe in tomorrow". We believe in tomorrow!

In common with farmers, horticulturists and gardeners everywhere, members of our horticultural society must plan and work now to be rewarded (hopefully!) with a harvest of food or display of flowers in the future.

In the spirit of the Audrey Hepburn saying, we have been able to have our annual members' daffodil competition, judged in a secure environment. Similarly, the Members' spring garden competition has been possible. We are also promoting our Members' fuchsia and potato competitions which are for our Autumn Show which we hope will be able to be conducted in the usual way come September.

With uncertainty about the availability of the Village Hall for our annual spring Plant Sale, we have changed the format and are holding it as a "Garden safari" with plants available at about six venues around the village.

The foregoing is the upside, the following the down!

During the last year, the Horticultural Society has suffered in the same way as most other organisations in the village and elsewhere from being unable to undertake any of its usual activities, with venues closed and prohibitions on assemblies, coupled with the generally older profile of our membership, some with underlying problems. Monthly meetings have been impossible, but we have generally been able to 'roll over' our speakers to another year; the speakers suffer in the same way as the rest of us.

All that remains is our 2020 Christmas Party, likely to be held as a summer garden party around mid-summer, dependent upon any remaining restrictions, as we all get to meet up again.

Alan Pett

Chairman

Staplehurst Interest Group 2021

Staplehurst Interest Group has been held on almost every Thursday morning since mid-March in 2002 until 2020. Our merry band of residents have been starved of the social interaction our sessions offer (and the tea, coffee and biscuits). Having already in place a telephone tree, our shared numbers have proved invaluable for keeping in touch. About ten of us tried a Zoom call with a pre-booked speaker, but of course this was limited to those with the capability of joining in. In November, each member was asked to write a brief piece about themselves and a six-page newsletter was circulated with a Christmas card to all members. Some interesting hobbies had been re-kindled and we are expecting to see the fruits of our endeavours when we meet again, don't know where, don't know when

Keep smiling. It'll make them wonder what you've been up to!

Joan and Malcolm Buller

Staplehurst Monarchs Youth Football Club 2021

The club were formed in 1971 and are currently celebrating our 50th anniversary. Obviously, celebrations have been severely restricted due to Covid-19, however we are currently producing a 50th anniversary programme to celebrate this milestone. Plans to hold an expanded 'Presentation Day' at Jubilee Sports Field have been postponed until 2022. We will instead hold an online Presentation Day event in June as we did last year.

This season we have 16 teams ranging in age from U8s to U18s including 4 girls' teams at U10s, U12s, U14s and U16s. We are also running 2 age groups of development football for U6s and U7s who are known as 'Mini Monarchs'.

Following easing of the latest lockdown, we restarted training and playing matches from 29/03/2021. Like everyone else we were unable to play from early November 2020 onwards.

A new feature this season, is our link with the Messiah Soccer Team based in Jinja, Uganda. We started sending them spare football shirts and equipment from August last year. We are very pleased to help their coach Eric Waiswa and the 4 teams he runs for under privileged young people.

We are pleased to say that 5 of our older players played for the Men's reserves during their shortened season, hopefully something we will continue to do in the future.

We continue to use social media notably Facebook and Instagram to publish the club's news. We also occasionally contribute information and photos to the Staplehurst Parish Magazine.

Jubilee Sports Field still suffers from drainage problems and even though we couldn't play between November 2020 and March 2021 it is unlikely that we would have been able to play very much anyway due to another wet winter. The installation of a floodlit 3G pitch would make a huge difference to our club as during 'normal times' we have to travel far and wide to find suitable training facilities during the winter months. Indeed, a few of our teams were unable to find suitable places to train due to limited availability.

We provide sport for more than 200 young people and their families. This wouldn't be possible without the commitment of our small dedicated committee, managers, coaches, parents, sponsors and the young people themselves. We would also like to thank Staplehurst Parish Council for their continued support together with the Jubilee Field Management Committee.

Lee Seal

Staplehurst Monarchs Youth FC – Club Secretary

The Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan Review Group 2021

The Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan Review 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 and 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.

Margaret Arger

Chairman

Paddock Wood & District Lions Club Report 2021

Paddock Wood & District Lions Club is your local charitable organisation which has been serving the community for over 38 years. Our membership of men and women of all ages and walks of life, come together to fundraise, support the community and socialise.

Our area of operation covers Brenchley, Collier Street, East Peckham, Five Oak Green, Goudhurst, Horsmonden, Lamberhurst, Marden, Matfield, Paddock Wood, Staplehurst & Yalding and our members live throughout the district.

In normal times we run a variety of fundraising events including the Annual Duck Race, Easter Egg Competition and the East Peckham 10k Fun Run. Last December, our Santa's sleigh did still manage to tour the streets of Paddock Wood, East Peckham and Lamberhurst, with Father Christmas saying hello to the children along the way. The communities visited really appreciated seeing the sleigh and we were able to raise valuable funds for charitable causes.

During the Summer, we usually run our big Carnival Weekend with the 'Rockin in the Rec' live music event, as well as the Paddock Wood Carnival & Fete which normally draws around 2000 people. We had to cancel these events last year, however we are planning to run them in some form this year (on 9th/10th July), provided of course that covid restrictions have been sufficiently lifted to permit.

All of this is to raise money for local, worthwhile causes and we donate to individuals, families, clubs, societies and charities which gives us the flexibility to respond to emerging need. Examples of how we've helped over the last year include paying for repairs to a scout hut, buying school uniforms for children of low-income families starting secondary school and donating food via the local ambulance service. A few months ago our Club made a large donation and delivered fresh fruit and vegetables to the local food bank to support them through the Christmas period. We also gave a large donation to Brenchley ReadyCall to support them in delivering hot meals to elderly residents during lockdown.

This Spring we are launching our 'Lions Big Heart Giveaway' whereby we have a pot of £3000 to spend across a range of projects, ideas and people. We are seeking suitable requests from organisations, clubs, societies and individuals for funding up to any amount, with each application to be assessed on its merit.

Once we can safely meet again both indoors and outdoors, we will resume a range of social events such as chilly nights, safari suppers, our Christmas meal, a black-tie event to celebrate our Club's Charter Anniversary and maybe once again play bat 'n' trap at some local pubs! Meanwhile we have managed to keep in touch with each other by holding our monthly meetings (and a quiz evening!) via zoom.

We always welcome new faces so if you are interested in volunteering, or can think of something or someone where help from your local Lions Club could be needed, call 0345 833 9564 or email enquiries@paddockwoodlions.co.uk. You can also find us on Facebook at Paddock Wood & District Lions Cl

Poppy's Day Nursery & Poppy's Baby Care Unit 2021

At Poppy's Day Nursery we are approaching our 13th year in August of providing 'full day' childcare for Staplehurst and the surrounding areas. At Headcorn Road we care for children aged 2-5yrs and our Baby Care Unit in the High Street cares for children aged 3 months-2yrs.

Both Settings hold *a "Good" rating from OFSTED - view online at www.ofsted.gov.uk.*

With the Covid pandemic of 2020 we had to close on 24th March and re-opened on 1st June. During this time our staff were furloughed and on re-opening all members of staff returned.

Currently we have **23** members of staff **5** of whom are Apprentices being trained under the "Apprentice Scheme in Childcare" supported via Parenta. We also have one volunteer.

One member of staff is now completing their qualifications for Level 3 in childcare.

Last September **24** children moved to Primary schools which is the highest transition numbers ever in 12 years of operation. We currently have **64** children 'on role' most of whom are from Staplehurst and have waiting lists with some places booked for 2022.

We access KCC courses to develop staff in all areas of nursery care; this has included Safeguarding and SENCO Courses. All staff are trained in Paediatric First Aid and have recently undertaken a refresher course including the use of a defibrillator. Our Headcorn Road Nursery has a Defibrillator fitted to an outside wall in a locked cabinet. In an emergency dial 999 and a code will be given to unlock the cabinet to access the device.

We continue to maintain links with the local Primary Schools, Pre-Schools, and Village Library.

Our normal nursery activities and fundraising have obviously been seriously reduced this year however we managed to raise **£120** for Children in Need with a "Pyjama Day" at Nursery.

For the first time last year Father Christmas was not allowed to visit the children at the nursery but we managed a special online Zoom call to him.

For more information on Nursery care contact Katherine Tunnicliffe

Poppy's Day Nursery Tel: 01580 892600 Poppy's Baby Care Unit Tel: 01580 890480

Email: poppysdaynursery@gmail.com Website: <http://www.poppysdaynursery.com>

Road Safety Group

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 Eric 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 if hedges have become overgrown and need cutting back. We have some residents on scooters who help keep us on our toes over these issues!

We weren't 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 it is better than it was and hopefully it will be safe.



Staplehurst Scout Group 2021

Scouting in Staplehurst has suffered under the coronavirus restriction rules over the last year and like everyone else we have tried to make the most of life as we've never known it before. We have endured almost a full year of enforced closure of the Scout Centre and all meetings and events. We were very fortunate to get in a visit to the Imperial War Museum at Duxford just before the restrictions and we all had a fantastic day out. We look forward to doing more visits this summer – rules permitting of course!

At Scouts, we looked to try and make use of the enforced closure of the Scout Centre and this did at least give us the opportunity to demolish our old toilet facilities and build a new facility with a fully specified accessible toilet to allow all differently abled children to enjoy scouting. We were determined not to pass the cost burden on to our parents and guardians and so we started fund raising. We were delighted that so many local businesses were willing to help with funding, even in very difficult trading times for them. Thanks also to the Staplehurst Events Committee for a donation and a very special thank you to the Newlyn Trust for an unbelievable donation of £4,000. We were getting very close to our target when the Community Fund looked favourable upon us and got us over the target.

All we had to do then we get the works done. Here we must mention the fantastic help and support of Paddy Riordan who not only persuaded us that we could do a lot of the work ourselves if we rolled our sleeves up and got stuck in, but also led by example and become our motivator, problem solver, and chief builder. Paddy also helped us mobilise local tradesmen to do the specialist jobs and we are very grateful to all the local traders who gave their labour for free or at mate's rates. This proved to us that Staplehurst has a beating heart and also that you can get almost every job done you can think of with excellent local tradesmen and women and at very affordable prices. So, why not keep it local!

A full list of our 'toilet roll of honour' – those who funded and helped with the project can be seen here on our website. <https://staplehurstscouts.org.uk/hot-news/upgrading-facilities-in-the-scout-centre>

Despite the lockdown, we have managed to hold some Beaver and Cub meetings via Zoom, and these have been well received even by the children who were getting 'zoomed out' with home learning. The leaders came up with lots of inventive games and puzzles to do on-line. The good news is that after the Easter break we can restart our meetings, following the Covid guidelines and with meetings outdoor only. Let's hope the spring weather is kind to us. We can't wait to get going again.

And to finish, we are always in need of finding new leaders and helpers so if you would like to get involved in any of our sections, even on a part-time basis, please get in touch by calling 893133 anytime. One constant theme for us at Staplehurst Scouts is that our waiting list of children wanting to join never gets any smaller - so please come and help and get involved in local scouting. To find out more please feel free to come along to our own AGM on Wednesday 30th June starting at 7:30pm in the Scout Centre in Nicolson Walk, off Crowther Close. Of course, regulations permitting!

William Best

Chair, Staplehurst Scout Group chair@staplehurstscouts.org.uk

Community Speed Watch 2021

Since its inauguration in 2006, Staplehurst Parish Council has been at the forefront in its 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.

The pandemic has curtailed these activities as the 'duty of care' of Kent Police to their volunteers and staff has meant the reduction and suspension of the scheme during the different levels of lockdowns. Therefore, since April 2020, Staplehurst Speed Watch has only deployed on ten occasions 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. We all recognise how much speeding there is throughout the village. The more volunteers we have the more places can be covered more often. We need you to give a little time to help.

Joan and Malcolm Buller



Staplehurst Under 5 Playgroup 2021

What a year! Like the rest of the world, we have been affected by Corona, lockdowns, more lockdowns, tiers, vaccines, bubbles, masks, shielding and a lot of cleaning and hand washing. Lockdown 1 had us closing our doors along with everyone else in the country but, like others, we entered a new world of Zoom teaching - digital contact with our children and families. It's no substitute for face-to-face interaction but it was lovely to see the children and hear how they, and their families, were getting on.

The end of the first lockdown saw us opening up again but very differently, initially with a smaller staff and cohort of children in separate bubbles as we all began to adjust. This new version of Playgroup saw many changes and our staff, children and families have all adapted wonderfully to mask wearing, saying goodbye at the door rather than parents coming in and frequent hand washing, as well as vast amounts of cleaning. Unfortunately, we couldn't have our usual trips, Christmas concert or Harvest Festival but we've had Zoom parties at the end of the Summer and Christmas terms with the lovely Peggy Heron from Funtrain and had lots of fun at Playgroup exploring topics like Transport, Animals and Habitats and Seasons. We've developed new systems of communication with families such as contact books and, on our fantastic new website, the ability to request a meeting with a member of staff, particularly useful for those parents who don't come to the Playgroup themselves.

We've said a sad goodbye to Mrs Lineham and Miss Johnson, both long standing staff members of SU5, and welcomed Mrs Hoad, a former parent and volunteer, and Miss Chapman as our new Key Workers. This has enabled us to expand our sessions to include Monday and Wednesday afternoons, which we're very excited about and, judging by the popularity of these new sessions, so are our families!

Our wonderful Committee have worked very hard to support us through these tough times and organised some fantastic fundraisers – our Christmas Raffle, Garden Sale Safari (plans for the 2021 Safari are already underway) and our Easter egg hunt. The children have taken part in a sponsored event listening to stories which has raised lots of money to buy new books for our bookshelves.

So now we are entering the Summer term – warm days in the garden, snacks outside in the shade (provided very kindly by Marden Farm Shop), new children arriving and Ready for School sessions to prepare our older children for their journey onto big school. Having seen all our children and families face the changes of the last year with courage, humour and strength we have no doubt that the transition to Primary will be very positive for them all, although there will definitely be tears shed at our end when our not so littlies move on.

Village Centre

We've not been as busy as usual due to Covid-19, but we have been pleased to host the community hub which has helped a number of 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 had the Food market on the 18th April and look forward to many more community events. We have 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 and its 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 WI 2021

A weird, wacky and wondrous year for the WI.

Admittedly no meetings, however, the committee soon had to master the intricacies of Zoom for our monthly committee meetings.

Our first priority was to our members. One of the reasons for joining WI is for friendship, so we were quick to discover which members needed support for illness, bereavement or loneliness and we did what we could to help and support.

Our second priority was to our Village Community. We started by making nurses' laundry bags, then we moved on to head bands and one member actually made some scrubs. It soon became clear that face masks were going to be needed by all. The Parish Council kindly offered the selling outlet at the regular Hub. The ladies must have made over 1200 masks in three different sizes. As an outcome to that we were approached to make the red masks for all the Monarchs' football teams. So that was another 240 masks. I bet you didn't know what a successful and thriving football fraternity we have in Staplehurst!!!

VE Day was difficult to celebrate, however, our WI red, white and blue bunting soon adorned the Parade and cheered everybody up.

The WI Staplehurst Village Sign post was used for the Remembrance Day wreath, given that no parade could take place.

Then Christmas! The Parade was again transformed by a giant tree and lights. The WI made 50 metres of Christmas bunting to put up all between the trees. It all looked so good.

So, to the future.... We have a programme ready to roll out completely within government guidelines. Our annual Produce Show is all planned for September, speakers are booked throughout the Autumn and our Christmas Bash will be awesome!

Pam Payne

Secretary

Staplehurst Youth Club

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 1/4 of these funds in April 2020 to the Staplehurst Monarch, to assist in their shortfall for repair following a theft issue. Especially as 'outside' youth sport activity was looking possible in the near future. The remaining 3/4 were then returned to the Parish council.

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

Paul Kelly

Chairman