

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING OF STAPLEHURST  
held in the South Hall, Staplehurst Village Centre at  
8.00pm on Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2018

**PRESENT** – Twenty-two residents signed the attendance list. Also attending were ten Parish Councillors, County Councillor Eric Hotson, Borough & Parish Councillor John Perry, Borough Councillor Louise Brice, Parish Support Officer Jean Terry and Parish Clerk Mick Westwood.

**WELCOME** – Councillor Tom Burnham took the Chair and welcomed all attending the Annual Parish Meeting. He commented that the annual parish meeting was one of very few examples of direct democracy in Britain. He expressed thanks to the many voluntary groups that contributed to village life.

**MINUTES OF THE 2017 ANNUAL PARISH MEETING** – These had been circulated beforehand. There being no comments, minute pages 107-108 were signed as a true record by the Chairman.

**PARISH COUNCIL OVERVIEW** Councillor Burnham discussed a number of areas of parish council activity. Wimpey Field: much work had gone into improvements to enhance the area for wildlife and human visitors; thanks were given to the volunteers and Community Payback team for their efforts. Surrenden Field: an all-weather path had been laid across the southern end of the field and drainage work had been carried out; with the lease due to expire in 2019, the Parish Council had been engaged in discussions with Maidstone Borough Council about the freehold. Jubilee Field: creation of a 24/7 car park area had eased problems caused by cars parked along Headcorn Road in the vicinity of the field; the Fireworks event held on the field had been very successful; the Parish Council continued its specialised maintenance of the skate park and was investigating with the football club how to update and expand use of the football pavilion. Youth services: in 2017 the summer play scheme's operating hours were extended; the Parish Council continued providing grant funding to the Youth Club. Planning: the Parish Council's planning committee had considered all applications affecting the parish; it had represented Staplehurst at Maidstone Borough Council planning committee and at appeal hearings; it had recently organised a meeting of neighbouring parishes about gypsy and traveller issues. Highways: following a survey initiated and organised by the Parish Council, Kent Highways had recently extended double yellow lines in Headcorn Road; the Parish Council was engaged with Kent Highways and neighbouring parishes about safety and speeding issues on the A229. The Parish Council has funded some maintenance work at the churchyard. Councillor Burnham thanked parish councillors for their efforts, including those who had resigned since the previous annual parish meeting: Chris Claridge, Anne Gosling, Peter Spearink and Laurence Whittle. He also thanked the Parish Office team for its support.

**BOROUGH COUNCILLOR LOUISE BRICE PRESENTATION** – Councillor Brice commented on some issues that had occupied her time as a borough councillor. Waste: Maidstone Borough Council was taking a more aggressive approach to combatting fly-tipping and dog-waste; bagged dog waste could now be put in general waste bins. Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plan: although Councillor Brice had opposed the Local Plan and elements of the Neighbourhood Plan, she believed they offered some protection; she continued to oppose allocation of housing to land north of Henhurst Farm; with the government likely to want more housing in Maidstone, Councillor Brice was against spreading more around the villages but wanted more affordable housing provision for local people. Funding: she and Borough Councillor Perry had secured a funding allocation for reinvigoration of the northern

end of the village; borough councillors would have access to member grant funding for individual projects. Sports facilities: Councillor Brice expressed support for the cricket club and Jubilee Field. Thanks were extended to the local community for its spirit; also, particularly, to former parish councillor Peter Spearink for his hard work.

**BOROUGH COUNCILLOR JOHN PERRY PRESENTATION** – Councillor Perry echoed many of the sentiments expressed by Councillor Brice, including thanks to former parish councillor Peter Spearink; he thanked Councillor Brice and said they worked as a team and with Kent County Council to bring about improvements. Maidstone Local Plan: Councillor Perry said he felt it was flawed and had voted against it, being particularly unhappy about the late inclusion of the housing allocation for land north of Henhurst Farm. Neighbourhood Plan: he commented on the significant role played by local residents in developing and now monitoring the Neighbourhood Plan; the plan had been instrumental in preventing permission being given for at least two major applications. Councillor Perry commented that he wanted to keep his comments brief in view of the forthcoming borough council election.

**COUNTY COUNCILLOR ERIC HOTSON PRESENTATION** – Councillor Hotson said he had held regular meetings with representatives of the Parish Council. He commented on the challenges facing local government, notably the budget savings that Kent County Council had to make (£80m in one year). KCC provided 300 services to Kent, but 70% of the budget was spent on care. As Cabinet Member for Corporate and Democratic Services, Councillor Hotson's responsibilities included KCC's property portfolio and staff; following redrawing of division boundaries, his division no longer included Loose but now incorporated Marden and Collier Street. Member grants had been reduced to £20,000 per member. Highways: £8m was allocated for a pothole blitz. Rural bus services: a consultation would take place at the end of May. Councillor Hotson thanked Borough Councillors Brice and Perry for their hard work.

**STAPLEHURST VILLAGE CENTRE UPDATE** – Councillor Rory Silkin discussed the current status of and plans for the Village Centre. The site is run by a charity managed by seven trustees. Its vision is to bring the building up to modern standards by extensively refurbishing the two main halls with as little disruption as possible to users; the intention is to retain the frontage; plans for the remaining buildings are up for discussion; one idea is to convert the ground floor committee room (currently used as a store room) into a meeting room; the North Hall walls are to be professionally sand-blasted to expose the brickwork, the floor will be professionally restored and the lighting updated. The South Hall boiler requires attention. External LED lighting has been installed. The charity is converting to Charitable Incorporated Organisation status; people will be able to become members.

### **ELECTORS' QUESTIONS & COMMENTS**

Questions and comments were aired about a number of parish issues:

Fireworks Event: over 2,500 people attended a very successful fireworks' display at Jubilee Field in November 2017; thanks were given to the Parish Council for its early donation that funded the initial investment in the event. Some lessons had been learned and will inform organisation of the 2018 event which will have a pirate ship theme.

Parking in the village: Bell Lane car park is in a poor state. It is owned and managed by Maidstone Borough Council which does not have the budget to resurface it. Parking provision at the railway station is being improved. The changes to the layout of the Jubilee

Field car park and the extended double yellow lines have alleviated the situation on Headcorn Road.

Neighbourhood Plan: several comments made reference to the Neighbourhood Plan. Maidstone Borough Council's approval of the Bletchingley Farm application showed a disregard for the Neighbourhood Plan; pressure should be brought on the borough council for it to accept the plan's policies; Councillors Burnham and Perry commented that the Bletchingley Farm decision was a poor one. It was important to ensure the Neighbourhood Plan was up to date; a refresh of the plan would make it newer than the Local Plan and thereby of higher rank.

Staplehurst Scouts: this year marked the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of scouting in Staplehurst. The scouts were fundraising to buy a defibrillator for the village and wanted ideas about where to site it.

Village Forum: discontinuation of the Forum was not appreciated, particularly by those who did not want to use Facebook. Councillor Lain-Rose said the new web site provided a news page which could be used for sharing information.

Village Centre: several attendees made comments on the future of the Village Centre. The comments included: the whole building should be demolished; the centre should be rebuilt behind the façade; time and effort had been invested in redesign suggestions which had not been pursued; it had been estimated that complete redevelopment would cost in excess of £1.5m; costs of current plans are yet to be determined; the AGM of the Village Centre Management Committee was overdue; given the needs of the Village Centre it was surprising that the trustees had relinquished their claim on the contingency fund held by the Parish Council; it was important to respect the needs of existing users during any planned works.

Jubilee Field: Councillor Riordan commented that the management committee was keen to use the field for a wider range of sports and was looking at how to make better use of the pavilion building.

Councillors: thanks were extended to parish, borough and county councillors for their work on behalf of Staplehurst. The Parish Council currently had three vacancies and would welcome enquiries from people interested in joining.

The meeting closed at 9.35 p.m.

Chairman.....