

Village Update

SPRING 2014

www.staplehurstvillage.org.uk

Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan Your Say, Your Opinions, Your Future



The latter months of 2013 saw much activity concerning the development of the Neighbourhood Plan. The consultation events raised many new ideas and questions concerning the future of Staplehurst. The Parish Council has agreed to continue with the professional services of FERIA Urbanism, Planning Consultants for the next stages.

The proposed stages in 2014 are:

- Exhibition and Consultation Event - 31st January to 28th February
- First full draft of Neighbourhood Plan - End of February
- Exhibition and Consultation Event - **Thursday 13th March** in the United Reformed Church – all day and evening followed by Exhibition at the Village Centre Saturday 15th and Sunday 16th and in the Library during the following week
- Regulation 14 draft of Neighbourhood Plan - End of March
- Consultation to run for six weeks from 31st March to 12th May with a Drop-In event on 1st May followed by weekend exhibition on 3rd & 4th and in the Library during the following week (provisional)
- Regulation 15 draft of Neighbourhood Plan - Middle to end of May
- Consultation to run for six weeks from 2nd June to 14th July with a Drop-In event on 3rd July followed by weekend exhibition on 5th & 6th and in the Library during the following week (provisional)
- Prepare Plan for Referendum – end of Summer 2014 – date to be confirmed.

It is intended for any Referendum to take place in 2014.

So far six policy themes have emerged:-

1. "Ensure development brings an appropriate level of investment into community infrastructure"
2. "Reduce pressure on the crossroads in the centre of the village by ensuring alternative access routes; develop a

better connected series of village streets"

3. "Strengthen the focal heart of the village around the Village Centre, Library, School and Parade"
4. "Improve the function and visual qualities of the land around the station; ensure other approaches to the village are visually appealing"
5. "Identify and strengthen specific green edges to deliver a long-term edge to the village; and improve public access to the countryside beyond"
6. "Ensure the mix of new housing responds to local needs and demands in terms of prices, sizes and tenures"

The first round of consultation has taken place. Questionnaires are still available as paper copies in the library, or respond on line, with a closing date of February 28th. MBC has just released its draft Borough Local Plan for consultation showing two preferred sites for Staplehurst proposing 370 houses on the Hen and Duckhurst, Marden Road site and 535 on the Fishers Farm to Headcorn Road site. With developers queuing up to build here there is now an even greater argument to have a credible and viable Neighbourhood Plan in place. It is up to Staplehurst to shape its own future.

For continual news on the Neighbourhood Plan please see http://www.staplehurstvillage.org.uk/future_of_staplehurst.aspx

If you have any ideas or queries please contact the Parish Clerk.

The Department for Communities and Local Government has selected Staplehurst Parish Council as one of the recipients of a Supporting Communities in Neighbourhood Planning grant of £7000.

Staplehurst

Parish Council

Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan - Exhibition and Consultation

The Main Exhibition took place on Friday 31st January in the Village Centre. The event ran from 9am to 10pm enabling residents, land owners, property developers and business owners to attend. Our independent Planning Consultants - Feria Urbanism - facilitated the event and five presentations took place throughout the day. All the Exhibition posters and materials can be viewed at - <http://www.feria-urbanism.eu/downloads/4581838784>

Despite the very wet weather 203 people turned up and many asked pertinent questions, highlighting issues and concerns as well as offering new ideas. These Q and A sessions were recorded to assist with shaping the future Policy Themes. The Exhibition continued throughout the weekend and a further 155 attended the event. It is hoped that many more people now have a greater awareness of the Neighbourhood Plan and how they can have a say in its future.

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING – Monday 12th May 2014 – 8.00 pm South Hall Village Centre

The meeting will be hosted by the Parish Council for local electors to discuss matters affecting the parish. Activity reports by the Council and village groups will be published. Verbal reports and questions will be taken at the meeting if time permits. Please submit reports (500 words max.) and any issues for discussion to the Parish Office by 17th April 2014. Reports will be included in meeting minutes for historical interest and published on the village website. We hope to have talks from visiting speakers and ward councillors - an interesting evening with refreshments included!

STAPLEHURST EMERGENCY HELP TEAM

The Staplehurst Emergency Help Team was set up in 2010 to provide assistance to village residents who suddenly faced an emergency. Fire, flood or transport catastrophes are typical. We are part of the Maidstone & county-wide emergency response system. We are typically engaged by the emergency services (fire, police etc.). They in turn are alerted through a call to 999 or 101 (non life-threatening). We can provide a safe place for people affected to congregate – a community refuge – and a hot drink and perhaps a meal. We aim to lay the ground for the emergency services to take control, or deal with minor incidents ourselves. So in an emergency call 999 or find our number on the council website (07517 383600).

A hard copy questionnaire is available from the Parish Office. An on line questionnaire is available at - <http://www.feria-urbanism.eu/downloads/4581838784>

These questionnaires will be independently collated and analysed by Feria Urbanism. The closing date for the return of hard copy questionnaires to the Parish Office is 1pm on Friday 28th February 2014. The closing date for the online questionnaires is 5pm on Friday 28th February 2014.

The Parish Council wish to thank Sobell Lodge who kindly assisted with catering and our WI who did a great job with the refreshments. The Parish Council thank all those who attended and contributed, including those of you who have yet to complete their questionnaires. Consultation will continue throughout the process and it is important that everyone has their say. It's your plan, your future.

COMMUNITY CLEAN-UP – SATURDAY 22ND MARCH

Staplehurst Parish Council is organising a clean-up of the built-up area on Saturday 22nd March and we would like to invite YOU to take part. MBC will loan protective equipment and litter pickers, remove the rubbish we collect, provide guidance on safety and give insurance cover. We will be based at the Youth Club (near Sobell Lodge), by kind permission of their committee, and we ask you to arrive at 10 am. When you have cleaned your allotted area sacks need to be brought back to the Youth Club so don't overfill them! We aim to offer you refreshments after the work is completed. For insurance purposes we have to keep a list of helpers' names. Children and young people who take part must be accompanied by and under the responsibility of a parent or adult friend. Organised youth groups who wish to join in should contact the Parish Office in the first instance to discuss their plans. Even if you are not able to take part please try to tidy your own boundaries to help make Staplehurst litter free!

We look forward to seeing you on the 22nd March.



DOG FOULING

Unfortunately thoughtless dog owners are still not clearing up after their pets even though this is an offence. The problem is particularly bad in the Offens Drive/Gybbon Rise area which could mean that children are likely to walk this in to school. The best way to deal with this is to report incidents to MBC either online at <http://www.maidstone.gov.uk/residents/report> or by phoning 01622 602202 to speak to Environmental Services. They have the power to take action against offenders.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

At this time of the year the Parish Council has to finalise its Budget and Precept for the next financial year commencing 1st April. As stated on previous occasions we aim to be a proactive Council and our budget will continue to allow for the broad range of services the Parish Council currently provides. These include among other things the maintenance of the public toilets, churchyard maintenance, street cleaning, the operation of the security cameras to ensure a safe environment and maintaining Jubilee and Surrenden Fields. We also consider that the provision of facilities for young people to be very important and we have allowed for the continued provision of a youth worker, the maintenance of the skatepark and funding for a further Uprockin event in the summer.

It should be noted that in most cases the budget will not have increased. However, I would wish to highlight three specific areas where this is not the case. First, the Parish Council owns and is responsible for 28 street lights in the Parish. We have carried out a review to see whether these lights are really needed or should be handed back to Kent County Council. Whatever course of action is decided upon, expenditure will be needed either to bring them up to standard to be handed over or to decommission them. Second, Parish Councils are required to maintain a certain level of general financial reserve. We consider that it would be financially prudent to increase

INCONSIDERATE PARKING

Once again we see people parking their cars on grassed areas around the village. The ground may be hard enough in the summer, but in the winter it just destroys the grass making the area look very untidy. Please be considerate and avoid parking on grass areas.



the current general reserve of £30,000 by £5,000 to allow for any future contingencies. Finally, we have allowed for further expenditure on the Neighbourhood Plan. The Parish Council agreed to continue with developing a Neighbourhood Plan and approved the reappointment of Fera Urbanism to assist in this process. These three items represent one-off expenditure because they will have benefits that will carry forward over a number of years and are more in the nature of capital expenditure.

The budget takes into account grants received from Central Government for the Neighbourhood Plan and from MBC for Parish Services and Council Tax Benefits. However, allowance has not been made for the grant for street lighting since doubts remain as to whether this will continue. The overall effect is to produce a Precept for the year commencing 1st April 2014 of £54.93 per annum for a Band D property. This represents an annual increase of £10.13 which is less than 20 pence per week.

John Perry

Chairman, Staplehurst Parish Council

BUS TRAVEL

We are sure that people will be aware of the many issues children have had with the Number 5 bus service into and returning from Maidstone. KCC have provided a dedicated school service and it is yet to be proven that this will alleviate the problems. Also there are proposed changes to the Kent Freedom Bus Pass. KCC were looking to cap the amount of credit they place on the pass. However, as a result of public pressure KCC have reversed their decision, but are increasing the cost of the "Freedom Pass".

AFTER THE FLOOD

The Parish Council is liaising with the Environment Agency to follow up issues arising from the recent floods. It would be helpful if any residents who have photographs of flooding arising from watercourses could contact the Parish Office with details. Ideally such photographs should be accompanied by information on location (grid reference) and time/date.

PLANNING UPDATE

The two planning applications by Tesco Stores for a new store near the station have not yet been finally decided. Application MA/12/0232 was refused by MBC, but Tesco appealed to the Planning Inspectorate. There will be an informal hearing in March. Staplehurst Parish Council has submitted a document explaining the reason for their recommendation and a number of local residents have also sent comments to the Inspectorate. Meanwhile, Tesco's new application, MA/13/1726, may be considered by the MBC Planning Committee in late February.

The application for a photovoltaic solar array at Great Pagehurst Farm, MA/13/1456, has yet to be decided by MBC.

Some other planning items: the application for three houses in Chapel Lane behind the Pride of Kent (MA/13/1657) was approved by MBC despite concerns expressed by Staplehurst Parish Council and the application for six new houses behind the former Bell pub, MA/13/1887 has been withdrawn by the applicant.

PARISH COUNCIL MEETINGS

Local electors and the press have a right to listen to Parish Council Meetings, but not to take part. At the beginning and after the closure of the Parish Council Meeting the Chairman will invite members of the public to speak for a maximum of 3 minutes each relating to issues on the Agenda or about issues of local concern.

You are requested to state your name and address prior to speaking. The Parish Council as a planning consultee makes recommendations to MBC which makes the decision.

All meetings are held in the South Hall, Village Centre. Planning Committee meetings begin at 7pm with Full Council following on at 7.30pm (if planning agenda is short). Contact the Clerk for details or check the website calendar page.

Meetings in 2014 (usually Mondays):-

March	3rd	17th
April	7th	22nd(Tuesday)
May	6th(Tuesday)	19th
Monday May	12th	ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
June	2nd	16th
July	7th	21st
August	4th	18th
September	1st	15th
October	6th	20th
November	3rd	17th
December	1st	15th

THANK YOU

Thank you all the volunteers who help the Parish Council in so many different ways. We are fortunate to have a great team working in the Parish Office and beyond! All this effort benefits our community and makes Staplehurst a better place. Don't forget that your councillors are volunteers too!

MAIDSTONE PET PARTNERSHIP

Maidstone Pet Partnership is a new initiative to help people and their pets. An unneutered female cat can mate from the age of four months and produce several litters a year. Neutering helps prevent a number of diseases and injury to cats and prevents adding to the unwanted kitten problem. Those on benefits can get help with costs through a voucher scheme; for details call Brenda on **01622 872195**.

CHRISTMAS LIGHTS

The new energy-efficient Staplehurst LED Christmas Lights were lit throughout December. The Parish Council is grateful for the generous donations that local businesses always make towards the displays. Contributions were received from Doves Funerals, Peter Jones Opticians, Radfords Estate Agents, Staplehurst Chiropractic and W J Crouch Butchers and their support is much appreciated.

HELP

Could you deliver some of our Parish Updates? We are looking for more volunteers to deliver the quarterly Updates, particularly in the rural areas. If you can help please contact the Parish Office.

Parish Council Information

COUNCILLORS

John Perry (Chairman)
Tom Burnham (Joint Vice Chairman)
Paul Kelly (Joint Vice Chairman)
Paul Butcher (Chairman of Planning)
Margaret Ashby
Joan Buller
Anne Gosling
Simon Green
Neal Kemp
Sam Lain-Rose
Barrett Manning
John Reardon
Adele Sharp
Rory Silkin
Peter Spearink

CLERK

Mr Mick Westwood

RESPONSIBLE FINANCE OFFICER

Mrs Sue Bassett

ASSISTANT to CLERK

Mrs Deborah Jenkins

Address:

The Parish Office,
Village Centre, High Street.
Staplehurst TN12 0BJ

Email: clerk@staplehurstvillage.org.uk

Tel: 01580 891761

Opening hours:

9am to 1pm Mondays to Fridays,
except on Thursdays when it is by
appointment.

SURGERIES AT THE LIBRARY

Two Parish Councillors will attend a surgery at the Library on the second Saturday of each month from 10am until noon. Borough Councillor Lusty's surgery will continue on the last Saturday of each month. PCSO Pete Gardner will hold Police Surgeries on these Saturdays at the library:-
March 1st 10am to 11am
April 5th 10am to 11am

You are welcome to talk through any local problems or ask questions about local issues.