

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING OF STAPLEHURST  
held via Zoom 7.00pm on Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> May 2021

**PRESENT** – Eight residents attended. Also attending were eight Parish Councillors, County Councillor Eric Hotson, Borough & Parish Councillor John Perry, Borough Councillor Louise Brice, Parish Support Officer Jean Terry, and Parish Clerk Alison Smith.

**WELCOME** – Councillor Paddy Riordan took the Chair and welcomed all attending the Annual Parish Meeting. He commented that it was good to be able to have a meeting following the cancellation of the 2020 event, but was mindful that attendance was limited by the ongoing challenges of the 2019 pandemic. He said that Staplehurst was fortunate to have a wide range of voluntary groups, many of which had provided reports about their activities for the meeting which were all available on the Parish Council's website. He confirmed that the Parish Council intends to run a Residents meeting later in the summer when it will be possible to meet face to face, subject to the relaxation of the lockdown restrictions.

**MINUTES OF THE 2018 ANNUAL PARISH MEETING** – These had been circulated beforehand via email. There being no comments, minute pages 112-114 were agreed as a true record by the Chairman to be signed at earliest opportunity.

**PARISH COUNCIL OVERVIEW** – Councillor Riordan spoke about the strange and difficult 15 months the Parish had encountered with the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. He advised that the Parish Council had managed to keep operational with the use of virtual meetings, and praised Councillors and staff for moving quickly to ensure that the Parish Council activity continued without any adverse effects. He praised the tremendous community effort and support given by the Staplehurst Emergency Help Covid Team to local villagers with the establishment of the volunteer help programme, the community hub and the volunteer transport for vaccines programme. He commented that it demonstrated the strong sense of community spirit within the village. Councillor Riordan went on to give a brief summary of some of the activities of the Parish Council during the last 15 months. He confirmed that he was pleased that the Council had managed to maintain the precept at the 2020 level for the forthcoming year. He was pleased to advise that there had been the appointment of a new clerk. Councillor Riordan finished by commenting how positive it was to have seen both large and small improvements in the village and how great it was to have been supported by such an excellent team of Councillors and gave his sincere thanks and appreciation.

**BOROUGH COUNCILLOR LOUISE BRICE PRESENTATION**

Councillor Brice echoed Councillor Riordan's comments and thanked the Council for their continued contributions to the village during this difficult time. She also thanked all the key workers, the community groups and the community hub. She spoke about her work to help improve the infrastructure within the village, in particular her work to help secure the new Sainsburys and with KCC to secure the bus provision for students. She spoke about work towards securing grants for new sports facilities.

**BOROUGH COUNCILLOR JOHN PERRY PRESENTATION**

Councillor Perry also commented in the strange year that had passed. He thanked and complimented the Parish Office Team for their efforts in ensuring that the Parish Council

services had been continued throughout. He also commented that MBC had also been able to continue their services throughout using the virtual medium which had enabled them to perform almost as normal. He reminded everyone that during the year MBC had also undertaken a number of significant issues including the Local Plan Review including the Regulation 18b consultation phase and commented that they were reviewing the outcomes of this and hoped to move to the Regulation 19 phase late June/early July. Councillor Perry was pleased to report that the Hazlitt Theatre had been saved through a cross party approach. Councillor Perry also commented about; the improved joint working group with KCC on infrastructure, his continued work to help resolve drainage issues around the village, the arrival of the new Sainsbury's and the Boundary Review that is taking place for MBC. He finished by thanking both the Chair and his Councillor Louise Brice for their contributions and positive working relationship.

### **COUNTY COUNCILLOR ERIC HOTSON PRESENTATION**

Councillor Hotson also congratulated all agencies in the village for the efforts to support the community through the pandemic, and commented that he felt it had heightened the sense of community spirit in the village. He spoke about the importance of the Parish Council HIP (Highways Improvement Plan), which he commented was now adopted as an approach by many parishes across the county, as being important in helping influence KCC on the priority of highways related projects. He spoke about the challenges of policing in rural areas and how the Kent Constabulary had been affected by Brexit and subsequently the pandemic, but that he hoped that the Commissioners commitment to enhancing the service to the rural districts of the County would be fulfilled. He advised that he had been happy to provide the grant to paint the library and hoped that it would re-open very soon. Councillor Hotson finished by thanking the staff of the Parish Council for their excellent support and Councillor Riordan for his excellent leadership during this difficult year.

Councillor Riordan thanked Councillors Brice, Perry and Hotson for their kind words and their reports. He reminded attendees that full reports were available on the Council's website from the Councillors and the Village Groups and would provide more detailed insight.

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

Speeding through the village, in particular along the A229 at the section known as The Quarter was raised by residents. A lengthy discussion covering a range of associated issues took place. Residents were concerned at the number of serious accidents occurring in that section of the road; a recent one which involved a vehicle driving through 4 gardens narrowly missing a house that occurred at 8.30 on a Sunday morning. They noted and thanked the Council for their work towards trying to improve the situation, but commented that despite the recent traffic calming measures, there appeared to be no marked improvement in the number of speeding vehicles, and they were keen to understand what steps could be taken to improve the situation.

Councillor Riordan explained the work of the Road Safety Group in compiling a HIP (Highways Improvement Plan) that was used to influence KCC in terms of improvement works. He stressed the importance of residents reporting all incidents not just the serious ones to [staplehurstroadinfo@gmail.com](mailto:staplehurstroadinfo@gmail.com). This would aid the Council in collecting evidence to support the case for change. He explained about the good work of the Speed Watch group, who are always looking for additional volunteers to train. He did however

acknowledge the challenges that KCC face as many of our neighbouring rural villages also have a main tributary road through their village and need support. He suggested to the residents that they may like to attend a Road Safety Group meeting or become members so that they could help both inform and support the actions of the Council.

Councillor Buller explained that the Road Safety Group were keen to get a pedestrian crossing in that section of the road, to assist residents in reaching the new Morrison's Daily and the bus stop, but they needed fresh data to support that action. She also explained that once traffic is back to normal levels, the Council had plans to undertake vehicle monitoring of the 4 key gateways into the village. She also stressed the importance of reporting any incident no matter how small to support the data gathering.

Residents advised that they were willing to attend the Road Safety Group and contribute in any way they can. They also confirmed that they would send in photos and information about past incidents to the Clerk.

The Leader of the Speed Watch Group spoke about the technical challenges in getting a crossing put in; specifically that KCC normally only put crossings into 30mph areas, but that The Quarter is a 40mph area. Additionally, they normally required residential properties to be on both sides of the road, where The Quarter is only populated on one side. He again stressed the importance of reporting.

Councillor Hotson explained that central Government rules required 3 or more deaths or serious injury in the same spot (1.5km stretch of road) within a period of 3 years, before a fixed speeding camera could be installed. He stated that he understood the frustration of residents, and suggested that pressure should be put on the MP's to change the rules, but that in the short term only the Police could enforce any speeding issues. He suggested that the Council consider inviting the Area Commander to a meeting to discuss the concerns.

It was agreed that the Road Safety Group would continue to press for action to try to influence change from all associated agencies.

Other points of discussion were the work that some Councillors were doing to assist in enhancing the pleasant and green feel of the village, in particular the flower planters at the gateways and the work completed by the Payback Team.

Councillor Riordan commented that all Councillors had contributed to the village in many different ways during the pandemic, and thanked everyone for the fabulous work completed over the last year.

The Scout Group Leader thanked the Councillors for all their efforts and commented that it was appreciated by many residents.

With no further questions or business being raised, Councillor Riordan wished all parties good luck in the elections the next day and closed the meeting.

Meeting closed at 8.05pm

Chairman .....