

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING OF STAPLEHURST
held at Staplehurst School on Wednesday 18th May 2022

PRESENT – Ten residents attended. Also attending were six Parish Councillors, County Councillor Lottie Parfitt-Reid, Borough & Parish Councillor John Perry, Borough Councillor Louise Brice, Parish Support Officer Jean Terry, and Parish Clerk Alison Smith.

WELCOME – Councillor John Perry took the Chair and welcomed all attending the Annual Parish Meeting. He commented that it was good to be able to have the first face to face meeting now we seem to be coming out of the pandemic. He went on to introduce the guest speaker, Richard Thomas from btf Land and Property Experts.

SPEAKER

Richard Thomas gave a really interesting and humorous talk about farming from the past to the future. He ably linked this to Staplehurst through his own family experience of farming and then onto the future through his experience as a Land Agent. Many residents asked questions of Richard which were equally of interest. Councillor Perry thanked Richard for his talk on behalf of the Parish.

PRESENTATIONS FOR OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION TO THE VILLAGE

Councillor Buller announced that the Parish Council wished to make presentations on the retirement of two prominent and hardworking residents who had made significant contributions to the Village over many years. She proceeded to present residents Ken Collins and Robin Oakley with certificates and a small gift from the Councillors and Staff of the Parish Council. She went on to advise residents that it was the last Parish Meeting of the current Clerk, so on behalf of the Parish Council and the village she presented the Clerk with a small a gift to thank her for her 'fabulous' contribution and work for the Village.

Councillor Buller also read out a request from the Weald Club for the Disabled, where they were asking for Volunteers. The Parish Office Team confirmed that they would run a social media campaign to try to support the club and also link with Headcorn Parish Council and Marden Parish Council to get their support.

MINUTES OF THE 2021 ANNUAL PARISH MEETING – These had been circulated beforehand. There being no comments, minute pages 115-117 were agreed as a true record by the Chairman to be signed at earliest opportunity.

PARISH COUNCIL OVERVIEW – Councillor Perry read out a prepared note from Councillor Paddy Riordan who was unable to attend due to health reasons. Councillor Riordan commented that it has been yet another difficult year due to Covid-19, but was hopeful that the country now seemed to be emerging from the pandemic. He commented that the Parish Council had another productive year, continually supporting community groups and residents in areas such as planning matters and general improvements around the village. He advised that he keeps regular contact with the Police, Arriva, water and drainage suppliers and various others and that the Council works hard on gaining road improvements and road safety. He thanked the Parish Council staff for all their hard work. He ended by thanking the Residents, Borough and County Councillors for their unstinting support.

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 and noted the work done at the Parade, the Community Hub the Staplehurst Emergency Help Team to name just a few initiatives. She spoke about her work to help improve the infrastructure within the village and to try to protect it as far as possible from further development through her work on the proposed new Maidstone Borough Council Local Plan. She commented that it was great to see Sainsbury's now in full operation. Additionally, she advised that she had facilitated some improvements at the Health Centre through s106 funding. She advised that she had worked hard after storm Eunice to help facilitate a faster recovery from the power cuts and also with BT following the connection problems after the arson attack. Finally, she advised residents of the new Boundary Review and confirmed that she was happy with the recommendations that retained Staplehurst's electoral boundaries as the same as the Parish, resulting in keeping the two Councillor ward. She spoke of the strong advantages that this brings to the village.

BOROUGH COUNCILLOR JOHN PERRY PRESENTATION

Councillor Perry also commented about the strange year that had passed. He advised residents of the new hybrid cabinet style governance structures about to be implemented at Maidstone Borough Council. He confirmed that there would now be 5 Cabinet roles plus a Leader and Deputy Leader along with a number of policy advisory committees. He confirmed that Maidstone Borough Council were also now moving away from elections of one third of seats in every year for 3 years to the election of all seats once every four years. He updated residents about the work undertaken to review the Maidstone Borough Council Local Plan and whilst he appreciated that some residents would be unhappy with the proposals for some further development, he advised that they had fortunately managed to minimise the future housing allocation for Staplehurst. He confirmed that this was still subject to the Local Plan being approved by the Planning Inspector. He further advised that work was taking place at Maidstone Borough Council to try to make efficiency savings to reduce the impact on Council Tax in the future. He finished by thanking Councillor Riordan for his hard work as Chairman of the Parish Council.

COUNTY COUNCILLOR LOTTIE PARFITT-REID PRESENTATION

Councillor Parfitt-Reid gave a brief introduction to her written report. She explained that she hadn't expected to be able to attend and had therefore submitted a written report (can be viewed on the Parish Council website) and directed residents to that. She did comment that it had been an honour to represent the Parish and had worked hard on some key areas such as road safety to help drive improvements in the Parish. She thanked the Parish Council for welcoming her into the role and thanked Councillor Riordan, Borough Councillors Louise Brice and John Perry, Ex-County Councillor Eric Hotson and the Clerk for all their support in her first year.

GROUP PRESENTATIONS

Resident Bob Ham gave presentations on behalf of the Lions Club of Paddock Wood and Staplehurst Community Events Group, which can be viewed on the Parish Council website.

ELECTORS' QUESTIONS & COMMENTS

A resident spoke about the work being undertaken by the Parish Council Neighbourhood Plan Review Group, and commented that the proposals in the current Neighbourhood Plan

for development of the station area seemed to now be out of date particularly in light of the changes in the area throughout and as a result of the pandemic. He commented that he was aware of there is £675,170 in s106 funding that had been earmarked for the proposals at the station area (these monies need to be spent by January 2031) and therefore asked the Parish Council to prepare and put forward a list of infrastructure projects which might qualify for this funding. He also commented that the Parish Council should consider influencing Maidstone Borough Council in terms of infrastructure projects they would like to see included in any s106 agreement, if and when planning is approved for the land off Lodge Road.

The resident also raised the issue of the dangerous Cranbrook Road at the southern end of the village and urged the Parish Council to ensure that the speed limit is reduced to allow a pedestrian crossing to be installed, before someone is killed or seriously injured trying to cross the road to the bus stop or petrol station shop. He suggested that this could be a good infrastructure project for s106 funding.

Following the later point being raised there was a response given by the Chair of the Parish Council Road Safety Group, Councillor Adele Sharp, where she updated residents on the hard lobbying that had been done and was continuing to occur with KCC over the need for the reduction in speed and the introduction of a crossing. A discussion with residents on these issues followed. Councillor Sharp agreed that she would keep the Road Safety Group focussed on this issue.

Borough Councillor Brice commented that she would raise the issue of the station area development with the Lead Officer at MBC and would come back to the Neighbourhood Plan Review Group with any update on any proposals.

A resident further commented at how disappointing the turnout for the meeting had been and urged attendees and the Parish Council to try to do more to increase attendance at this important meeting.

As no further questions were asked Councillor Perry thanked everyone for attending and the meeting was closed.

Meeting closed at 9.40pm

Chairman