

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING OF STAPLEHURST
held in the South Hall, Staplehurst Village Centre at
8.00pm on Monday 25th March 2019

PRESENT

Nineteen residents signed the attendance list. Also attending were Community Warden Mira Martin, eleven Parish Councillors, County Councillor Eric Hotson, Borough & Parish Councillor John Perry, Borough Councillor Louise Brice, Parish Support Officer Jean Terry, Deputy Clerk & Finance Officer Deborah Jenkins and Parish Clerk Mick Westwood.

PRESENTATION BY INVOLVE KENT

Before the main meeting business, Marie Tomblin, Grants Fundraiser from Involve Kent discussed and answered questions about the work of Involve Kent in the fields of caring, community wellbeing and older people.

WELCOME

Councillor Tom Burnham took the Chair and welcomed all attending the Annual Parish Meeting. He commented that the annual parish meeting was a successful example of direct democracy in Britain. 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.

MINUTES OF THE 2018 ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

These had been circulated beforehand. There being no comments, minute pages 109-111 were signed as a true record by the Chairman.

PARISH COUNCIL OVERVIEW

Councillor Burnham discussed the three main areas of land owned by the Parish Council. Wimpey Field was being managed as a wildlife area while providing a pleasant walk for residents. Natural England would be creating a new shallow pond and Medway Valley Countryside Partnership would be repeating its successful BioBlitz event for children. The Parish Council was concluding a new 125-year lease for Surrenden Field. Completion of the lease would enable new investment in facilities to be made. The Parish Council had purchased a new mower and financed repair work at Jubilee Field and had supported the football club's planning application for installation of improved facilities. The Parish Council was about to take ownership of a section of KM312 to add to its smaller landholdings and continued to fund maintenance of All Saints Churchyard. Successful events included the summer play scheme, two clean-up days and a Stay Safe Staplehurst event, the brainchild of Councillor Symes. With financial assistance from Councillor Hotson, the Parish Council commissioned a survey of traffic on the A229; the results attracted coverage by TV, radio and local and national press. The Parish Council continued its work on planning matters by commenting on planning applications, starting a review of the Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan and engaging with developers to ensure residents' interests were represented. Councillor Burnham thanked members of the Council and the Parish Office staff. Councillor Buller thanked Councillor Burnham for his contribution as chairman of the Parish Council.

BOROUGH COUNCILLOR LOUISE BRICE PRESENTATION

Councillor Brice thanked Councillor Burnham. She spoke about her involvement in sporting matters, assisting the Cricket & Tennis Club with a planning application and working with the MBC sports officer to promote Staplehurst and secure funding. On the subject of speeding, she had initiated the meeting with Kent Highways which had led to the survey of A229 traffic

and was pressing for action. She commented on her efforts to obtain some progress with the Sainsbury's supermarket site and on the issues facing surgeries which faced a challenge in attracting GPs to work in local practice. She was lobbying for more resources to be put into the rural task force to make the community safer.

BOROUGH COUNCILLOR JOHN PERRY PRESENTATION

Councillor Perry thanked Councillor Burnham and thanked Mr Malcolm Buller and Councillor Buller for their Speedwatch work. He also extended thanks to retiring parish councillors and to Councillors Hotson and Brice. He commented that he had tried to secure transfer of the freehold of Surrenden Field to the Parish Council but felt that the new 125-year lease was acceptable. He and Borough Councillor Brice had put their borough councillor funding allowance towards drainage work on Jubilee Field. Reviews of the Local Plan and the Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan were very important; he felt that the main crossroads represented a constraint and could make further development difficult. He commented on the need for MBC action to achieve proper planning enforcement, which he thought was now recognised. There was a new waste crime unit at MBC. He referred to consideration being given to reorganisation of the committee system at MBC and to his advocacy of a change to the electoral cycle for borough councillors so that elections would occur every four years.

COUNTY COUNCILLOR ERIC HOTSON PRESENTATION

Councillor Hotson thanked Councillors Burnham, Brice and Perry and the Parish Office team. He said that Staplehurst was one of seven parishes in his district. He commented on the challenge posed by new housing developments in neighbouring areas. He had participated in meetings about traffic and speeding in Staplehurst and had sought the involvement of Kent Police; he observed that the problems were not unique to Staplehurst. In recent years the KCC member's grant had been reduced from £40,000 to £15,000; he had given assistance to Chapel Lane Pre-School, Speedwatch, Neighbourhood Watch and McCabe Centre and had also contributed funding towards the cost of the A229 traffic survey. He commended the proactive work of the KCC community wardens. He reported that KCC had made Brexit contingency plans. He praised the work of the many volunteers who enabled over 200 children of Staplehurst Monarchs Junior Football Club to participate in football activities.

VILLAGE ORGANISATIONS' REPORTS

Twenty-one village groups had submitted written reports, copies of which were available and on display at the meeting. No oral reports were made.

ELECTORS' QUESTIONS & COMMENTS

Questions were raised about a range of subjects.

Southern Relief Road: Councillors Perry and Hotson commented on the current status. Maidstone Joint Transport Board would receive an update later in the year.

Local Bus Service: a resident suggested the service failures warranted referral to the Traffic Commissioner's Office. Councillor Brice said she had spoken to Arriva and had a meeting scheduled to discuss the issue. Councillor Hotson said KCC was engaged. It was suggested that information be sought from MBC about the deployment of developer contributions for bus service improvements.

Village Centre: no information was forthcoming about future development.

Jubilee Field Car Park: Councillor Lain-Rose said that options for ways to improve the car park were being explored.

The Condition of the Parade, Station and Sainsbury's Sites: Councillor Lain-Rose said that the brick edges of the plant beds at the Parade needed to be moved away from the car park area; he and Councillor Brice had sought to engage with landlords. Councillor Burnham said that a small group of councillors had met representatives of Southeastern Railways, Network Rail and Maidstone Borough Council; ideas for short-term and longer-term station improvements had been identified. The Sainsbury's situation was challenging: Councillor Brice had been seeking progress on the supermarket site; some time ago Sainsbury's had responded to Parish Council requests and tidied up the hoarding and removed the canopy on the petrol station site.

Survey of Traffic on the A229: a question was raised about why the survey was undertaken in November. It was scheduled as soon as possible outside a holiday period to provide a baseline for traffic volumes and information about speeds.

New Highway Layout on Marden Road: residents commented that the new roundabout at Hen & Duckhurst Farm was being ignored. A resident suggested the temporary traffic lights may be affecting the flow; another resident commented that more arrows and chevrons were needed to improve visibility of the roundabout. The issue has been raised with Kent Highways and will also be taken up with the developer.

Eco-measures for new homes: a resident asked why homes on major developments appeared not to be bound by eco-requirements such as for rainwater harvesting. Councillor Perry said that design policies in the Local and Neighbourhood Plans were important. Councillor Brice commented on the challenge to build deliverable homes while taking account of constraints.

The meeting closed at 9.53 p.m.

Chairman.....