

Village Update

WINTER 2008

HIGHWAYS REPORT

During the autumn Councillors met several times with officers of Kent Highways and Maidstone Parking services. These meetings covered a large number of issues. The following are just some of the matters which were brought to their attention.

Marden Road

We emphasised that the Walking Bus had great problems crossing the Marden Road, due to traffic speed and volume as well as bad sight lines. We have been advised that a bid for funding will be made in the financial year 2009/2010 and if successful would be implemented in 2010-2011. Also we have asked for a Speed Camera to be sited on the Marden Road just within the 30 mph sign, but county-wide criteria for such may not be fulfilled. However, we may be more successful with a review of the street lighting around Maxted Close. We feel cars entering Maxted Close from the east may not be seen in poor light conditions.

Market Street

We have spent a lot of time discussing parking in general around the Market Street area and specifically the problems being caused by careless and thoughtless parking at the entrance to Market Street. Such parking is illegal and dangerous, often causing congestion such that residents cannot get to their homes or have difficulty walking on the pavement. Having to push prams along the road because of vehicles parked on the pavement is unacceptable. We are hoping to progress some suggestions to address this problem following a site visit with Highway Engineers and Parish Councillors.

For the time being Maidstone Housing Trust has withdrawn its proposed plans for building more houses on the garage site off Winch's Garth. This at least will not add to the the parking problems in the Market Street area, but revised plans could still be submitted at a later date.

Clapper Lane

We have asked for a weight restriction to be placed on the

bridge over the railway in Clapper Lane. As the bridge can be approached from both directions, deliveries could still be made to all premises. Large lorries don't need to use the bridge which is being damaged by too much weight and KHS and Network Rail have been asked to check it out and make repairs.

Bower Walk

MBC Parking Services Manager looked at the problem of cars parking at the Surrenden Road end of Bower Walk and was horrified when he saw the problem and safety issues that had been raised by a local resident. This area will be the subject of inspection and hopefully appropriate action.

Lodge Road

MBC Parking Services Manager is also considering the highway safety issues around the Station Approach and Lodge Road areas. We are awaiting further dialogue on this.

The Parish Council also raised speeding issues in the village. We asked for an extension of the proposed 40 mph limit (this to replace the 50 mph existing limit on Maidstone Road in due course) back to Clapper Lane. We have been told this is not feasible as the area is within the remit of 60 mph roads. We also asked for an extension of the 30 mph zone in the Cranbrook Road to replace the current 40 mph at the Quarter, but this was also declined. The final request was for a 20 mph speed limit through the centre of the village, but once more this was declined because it is a main trunk road and it would not conform to county-wide criteria. In order to assist access to buses, a project to raise the kerbs at bus stops will be requested.

These are the main subjects raised recently on behalf of the village by your Parish Council. We will continue to work hard and pursue outstanding issues and process new ones. However, to end on a more positive note, we are hopeful that the long-awaited Gateways on the A229 at The Quarter and by the railway bridge will soon be installed and a funding bid for a new footpath from the Cricket Lodge to the southbound bus stop at The Quarter should be considered soon.

Staplehurst

Parish Council



A QUICK WORD ON SPEED

Every road user is an expert on 'road safety'; whether it's because you are a regular driver or rider, whether you are normally a passenger or whether you are a pedestrian. It's not 'rocket science' to figure out what you should do to make yourself and others a little safer on the roads and yet the choices you make will frequently place you, and those you value, in danger.

One specific choice all drivers and riders make regularly is the speed at which they travel. Sometimes it is appropriate to drive at the speed limit – and sometimes it is quite inappropriate to drive even that fast. Imagine passing a school in August, early on a fine summer morning. 30mph may be quite safe. However, now imagine passing the same school on a wet and grey December afternoon at 3.15pm. 30mph would be totally inappropriate. Speeding, in a 'road safety' sense, isn't just breaking the speed limit; it's as much about choosing the right speed for the location and current road conditions.

Government research says that around 1 in 3 of all

crashes has speed as the main causation factor – predominantly 'over the limit' speed. However, the simple fact is "if you crash it's because you couldn't stop in time if you cannot stop in time, you're travelling too fast", so by my reckoning all crashes involve some form of inappropriate speed; even if this is below the limit.

Speed and its role in determining whether the person you hit is killed, seriously injured or 'just' shaken up should not be underestimated. The faster you hit, the more damage you will do, but even this doesn't sufficiently address the issue of speed, why people do it and what the implications maybe.

Over the next 4 editions of your Parish newsletter I hope to outline a range of issues related to driving speed, to provide you with an insight into how speed contributes to between 250 (1 in 3) and 750 (all) deaths and serious injuries in Kent per year. The issues raised will be:

- What kind of speeder are you?
- I was only 5mph over the limit, what's the problem?
- What did the baked bean say to the elephant?
- So what is the limit?

Steve Horton,

Kent Highway Services Road Safety Education Team Leader

TREE WARDENS

I would like to introduce myself as the Tree Warden for Staplehurst. My name is Ron Ribbens. I moved into Corner Farm Road in June '07 from Southfleet in Kent. At the present time there are over 280 Tree Wardens in Kent.

What are Tree Wardens?

Launched by the Tree Council in 1990, for volunteers to work with Parish Councils and other bodies for the good of their communal trees; gathering information and providing early warnings of threats, disease, decay and vandalism.

I have recently attended two courses run by the Tree Council and British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV): 'Tree Wardens' and 'Hazardous Trees'. These courses are sponsored by National Grid, Communities and Local Government.

Unfortunately, all the Horse Chestnut Trees in our Parish are infested with Leaf Minor Disease. A small moth burrows into the leaves over winter and builds a cocoon in the dead leaves. It then hatches and eats into the new leaves in the spring. This has only been around for the last 3-4 years and at the moment there is no known cure.

Vandalism is present in the Village with broken trees and branches; the worst case is a mature Cherry tree in Winche's Garth.

As you may know a tree is owned by the person whose land the trunk stands in whether garden, field or wood. Branches hanging over roads, footpaths and gardens are the owner's responsibility so please look after your trees and enjoy them.

Ron Ribbens - Tree Warden

COUNCILLOR ANGELA KNOWLDEN

During the last three months I have been busy with helping to bring the Staplehurst Healthcheck to a conclusion. We hope the final document will be printed and available in late Spring 2009. Many of you have kindly filled in the questionnaire on the Village Website and hopefully more will do the same. It is very worthwhile exercise and will provide a clear picture of how each of us perceive our village and what we want for the future.

Another part of my job as a Parish Councillor has been to attend Highways meetings. This has been brought to the fore of our work, at this time, with many issues being raised and hopefully dealt with. In my Highways Report I have explained some of the problems and what is being done.

As Chairman of the Amenities it has been a pleasure to work with the committee and being part of the varied work they carry out.

DOG MESS

Once again it has been brought to the Parish Council's attention that there is an increased problem with Dog owners allowing their pets to defecate in public areas without clearing up the mess. We are all aware that it is only a minority that allow this, but it labels all owners. In particular Surrenden Field has been identified as having an increased problem. Please be reminded that if anyone witnesses this anti-social behaviour they can leave any details they have on the Dog Warden's line, 01622 602117.

Alternatively a message can be left with the Community Warden Chris Lomax on 07811 271254 (Chris has taken the 'lead' in this local issue,) or the Parish office. It should be noted that Surrenden has CCTV, so if anyone can provide descriptions, times and the area in the field, a camera can be retasked to cover this area to provide the authorities with evidence. Remember the Red Dog Waste Bins are there for a reason. Red Scoopit Bags are/will be available from the Parish Office or the Town Hall in Maidstone. Let's have a clean winter.

John Reardon.

VILLAGE PARTNERSHIP

1. Three of the four worksheets required for the SEEDA Healthcheck are virtually complete. Some final work is required on the SWOT analyses for these sheets. A decision needs to be made by the working group as to the necessity of undertaking a survey amongst local businesses, which may be required for a few outstanding elements of the Economy worksheet.
2. The Social and Community Worksheet requires a substantial amount of work to be completed. Much of this is desktop analysis using census and a wide variety of government and other data sources. The idea of appointing a paid co-ordinator to assist in the process has not yet been taken forward, so effort continues to be on a voluntary basis.
3. Some work has taken place on defining Staplehurst's hinterland as required by the healthcheck process and some hinterland maps have been produced. Further discussion is required amongst the working party to review these.
4. The electronic community opinion survey continues to be available via the Partnership web site and promoted by a door-to-door leaflet drop. 224 responses have been received to date which meets the group's target of over 200, and gives representation from over 10% of households. To take part in the survey go to www.staplehurst-partnership.com
5. With the majority of the worksheets nearing completion, and with underlying supporting evidence being collected from the community survey, the working party is now able to start drawing some conclusions.
6. The main thrust of the SEEDA healthcheck project is to identify 'economic development' projects that would directly and specifically contribute to the economic vitality and health of a locality. Any identified projects would then be candidates to bid for the funding available from the SEEDA rural market towns initiative.
7. No outstandingly obvious projects have yet come to the fore, but Staplehurst does have a variety of issues and opportunities. In co-operation with the County Council's advisor, the working group will continue to explore the possibility of securing funding from SEEDA for Staplehurst's benefit.

PENSION CHARITY OF WILLIAM LAMBE

This pension charity was set up at least a century ago to benefit elderly persons living in this area, and was taken over by the Friends of the Elderly in 1990. FOTE www.fote.org.uk prioritises its funds for older people who have no connection to the Service benevolent funds and have savings below £3,000 for individuals or £4,500 for a couple. If you or an elderly person you know might wish to make application to this charity, contact Brad Feltham at Friends of the elderly, 40-42 Ebury Street, London. SW1W 0LZ Email: brad.feltham@fote.org.uk

(Charity No: 234592)

STAPLEHURST ACCESS GROUP

The first meeting of the newly formed Staplehurst Access Group was held on 2nd October and the above name was adopted. The purpose of the Group is to lobby for disabled people and those with mobility issues both within the Village and outside in terms of transport. Four main areas of concern were quickly identified.

First was wheelchair friendly buses which are to be legally required by 2016, but other local routes have them already. Our contacts with Arriva and those made on our behalf by the Hawkhurst Local Transport Forum and Sobell Lodge have had varied replies. We might get them as early as next year, but if we do they might well be hand-me-downs from other more profitable routes which tend to get the newer buses.

Secondly raised kerbs at bus stops. At a meeting with Kent Highways recently they accepted that this was something that should be done and would liaise with Arriva as to where all the stops are on the No5 route through the Parish. We also noted that some dropped kerbs are a hazard for many wheelchair and scooter users.

Thirdly the timing of the main traffic lights was felt to be a matter that needed to be dealt with urgently. I am pleased to say that the Parish Council agree with this and are to put pressure on to Highways for something to be done and it emerged at the recent meeting that Highways are to investigate the possibility of having special sensors fitted which enable the green man to remain on all the while someone is on the crossing. This would cover walking buses as well as slow moving chairs and scooters. This is a facility which will be needed more when the new bridge is finished at the station so that wheelchair users can actually get to the station in safety.

Finally it was considered a priority to get a pedestrian island in the road by the two bus stops at Vine House. Previously we had been told that this was not possible for safety reasons. It was thought that a vehicle coming over the brow of the hill would not have time to stop if someone was crossing from the Vine House side to the central island. This is a very contentious issue. Many people agree with the above, but others, myself included, disagree. After the meeting with the representatives from Kent Highways I took the one responsible for this side of their work down to see the situation and he had to admit that maybe we do have a case and has promised to look again at the problem. This is something where common sense must fight entrenched attitudes. However, he did promise to put up an 'elderly persons crossing' sign on the redundant post opposite the church entrance facing downhill which at least will give drivers a warning.

Further meetings are to be held on the first Friday morning of every month at Sobell Lodge who are one of the major partners in this new group and we are grateful to them for their hospitality. So if you have any issues that you think the group should take up then come along to the next meeting or contact me directly. Alternatively post something on the Forum. Also look out for the new style Parish website where we hope to have our own page with up to date news and information.

Cllr. Peter Spearink

CHAIRMAN'S LETTER

Dear All,

It is a little tricky writing for the December Village Update when in October with a blazing sun shining through the window!

Your parish councillors have worked diligently again this year on your behalf. Councillors attend many extra meetings during the year looking at areas such as highways, planning and environment which directly impact on our lives and have met with mixed outcomes, which we will continue to pursue.

The monthly surgery at the library with your borough councillor, police and parish councillor gives a further opportunity for advice and guidance on an informal basis.

The Forum is now an agenda item for councillors to discuss any "strings" which raise views and a sharing of concerns.

It would be greatly appreciated if some of you could spare the time to come to a council meeting during the year. Any chance this could be a New Year resolution for some of you?

We hope you have enjoyed the Christmas lights this year and would like to take the opportunity of wishing you all the compliments of the Season.

STAPLEHURST LIBRARY

A funny thing was asked of one of our librarians just recently. "How much does it cost to join the library?" IT'S FREE! Do our commuters who read on the train realise that our library has lots of new books including paperbacks published this year? For anyone studying almost anything a book on the subject can be ordered if it is not in stock. From toddlers through teens to maturity there is plenty to interest. It is sad that many residents do not use these free services. Do you?

NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH

I am the link councillor for the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme and have been since our scheme began in the Autumn of 1986. I was elected Treasurer, a capacity in which I still serve. At our recent AGM David Ralph was re-elected Chairman and Jeannette Whitford Secretary. We have a small committee who work very hard to promote care in our neighbourhood. More co-ordinators are always welcome so if you would like to find out more contact one of us.

Councillor Joan Buller

CONSTRUCTION BEGINS AT JUBILEE SPORTS FIELD!

The long awaited construction of the new sports changing facilities began on Monday 13th October 2008 and is expected to take 20 weeks with completion during the first week of March 2009. Barwick Construction Ltd., was awarded the tender and has wasted no time in getting the site prepared.

The first jobs have included fencing off the site compound for security and protection of existing trees to comply with MBC landscaping conditions. Works to extend the existing car park and preparation of the site for pile driving were due to take place at the time of writing. However, a digger was stolen from the site overnight which has caused problems.

Provided no further thefts cause delays, the roof should be on before the Christmas break. The electrical, plumbing and decoration works to complete the four changing rooms, officials rooms (all with showers and toilets), together with a small kitchen and social area, will be worked upon early in the New Year. Meanwhile partnership working amongst the Parish Council with the Football Clubs to finalise the legal documentation is continuing. The Football Clubs will be responsible for the future running and maintenance of this new facility.

This project has been made possible thanks to the major grant awarded by the Football Foundation and supported by a number of other grants from Kent County Council, Maidstone Borough Council, Staplehurst Parish Council, all Football Clubs and the Guides.



Football Foundation
football's biggest supporter

SPEED WATCH

One of my council roles is the Parish Speed Watch Liaison Councillor. I liaise between the council, the police and our willing team of volunteers. I regularly form part of a team on the roadside with our parish speed monitoring equipment, help write and deliver newsletters to our volunteers and write articles for the Update which keeps parishioners informed. We hope that you see us out and about at our ten sites in Staplehurst, doing our best to remind motorists that they should observe the speed limits. We would like to see the equipment in use more often so if you are interested in being trained please contact me or the Parish Clerk.

Parish Council Information

The Parish Office is in the Village Centre. It is open on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday mornings from 9 to 11 am. The phone number is 01580 891761. The email address is: staplehurst1@btconnect.com

Borough Councillor Lusty holds a Council Surgery at the Library on the last Saturday of each month, from 10am to

12pm. This is supported by a Parish Councillor and one of the community policing team; Community Warden Chris Lomax, PC Marc Pennicott or PCSO Pete Gardner. You are welcome to talk through any local problems or ask questions about local issues with any or all of these Councillors and officers.