

# Village Update

SPRING 2007

## The Burial Ground extension

In 2003 plans were drawn up and planning approval given for the development of the burial ground south of the existing grave yard at the Parish Church.

Designated as an area of wildlife importance, specific conditions were placed on the development of the site as a burial ground. These included the planting of an indigenous species hedgerow and other plantings.

A post and rail fence along the eastern boundary and a close boarded fence along the southern boundary were installed, prior to the winter planting of the hedge. The planting area had been prepared in the late summer with weed suppressant membrane laid to stop the grass from growing and keep the area free from pernicious weeds. The membrane also helped to retain moisture in the soil to make planting easier and encourage good growth of the plants. The tree whips were bought from a specialist supplier who grows cuttings taken from existing indigenous hedgerow.

The planting of nearly 1,000 tree whips began in mid December and was completed on Christmas Eve. Each tree whip was staked and a tree guard placed around it. This was to provide protection from rabbits and to give the plant support. Both rows of hedging were then covered with well rotted horse manure in order to give the

plants a chance to grow well. These tasks were voluntarily carried out by Parish Councillor Wendy Green, with help from her son Martin, Parish Councillor Don Wood and local resident Mr David Davies.

In addition to the new hedging some trees will also be planted in the future to provide structural features and shade in the new burial ground. Staplehurst Parish Council applied for 24 trees from the Free Tree Scheme run by KCC, supported and administered by Medway Valley Countryside partnership. It is hoped that over the next few years all the trees and hedging that has been planted will grow and provide a natural landscape feature with lots of wildlife interest.



Picture courtesy of Ron Hegarty

## CCTV ON THE SURRENDEN ROAD FIELD

The CCTV cameras in Surrenden playing field have been in situ for nearly two years. They continue to be an aid to deterring anti social behaviour but an unacceptable amount still occurs. Last summer many attempts were made to move the cameras and attack the infra red lamps. This required visits from the security company and Parish Councillors to re position them. Since the spiked collar was moved into a new position and anti vandal paint put on the roof the cameras have remained safely covering the right areas.

Over the Christmas period heavy rain and high winds were not kind to the electrical equipment. Further damage occurred which has now been rectified and 24/7 recordings are back.

During last summer a large amount of anti social behaviour was recorded by the equipment. The Community Warden and local Police Constable Marc Pennicott have identified individuals and cautioned them. One such recording of vandalism to the play equipment resulted in the offender being arrested and taken to court. The Parish Council invited the parents to reimburse the cost of repair. We are still waiting for the cheque.

If anyone witnesses anti social behaviour on the field (in addition to alerting the authorities) please make a note of the date and time and let the Parish Office know. Recordings are stored on the system for one month, but copies of incidents are passed to the police to help with their investigations.

# Staplehurst

*Parish Council*



# Life as a Parish Councillor - Georgie Collins

I was co-opted on to the Parish Council in September 2006 when a vacancy arose owing to a councillor moving out of the Parish. I joined the Council because I wanted to become involved in our village life and be a part of those decisions which affect our community.

Think of a Parish Council and many people conjure up the image of Dawn French in the Vicar of Dibley, village fetes and flower shows. That's far from the reality with our Parish, which is one of 6 Councils in Kent to have achieved "Quality Parish" status and is one of the largest Parishes in Kent with 15 members.

So, what does the role involve? Well, in addition to the main Council, I also sit on two sub-committee's namely, the Planning Committee which makes recommendations on all planning matters and the Amenities Committee which deals with most things other than finance and planning, such as highways, street lighting, environmental issues and our youth club. The Parish Council meets one a month, the Planning Committee twice a month and Amenities once a month, so that's a commitment of 4 meetings a month. There is an agenda for each meeting and usually numerous pieces of correspondence to read in advance. So far as planning is concerned, all applications are published on Maidstone Council's website. I try to have a look at local applications prior to a meeting so I am well versed with the issues we are likely to consider. It's a common misconception that a Council recommends approval or refusal of planning permission based on whether they like the look of a plan. The reality is that we have to adhere to a strict set of legal guidelines, the Development Plan and various other planning policy guidance notes as to what can and can't be approved.

In addition to meetings, the Council has various other focus groups which Councillors get involved with relating to the affairs of the village. An example of a committee I am involved in relates to Christmas lights which is concerned with funding the 2007 display, what type of display we can have and where it should

be situated. Other activities I have been involved with include, putting up Christmas trees above the shops at the Parade (the most hair-raising task so far as there is a small ledge on which to balance, which was at the time very wet and slimy!), monitoring the progress of the Village Medical Centre and along with other councillors and parishioners attending the tour of the new Medical Centre and public meetings with the PCT. As a new mum, I have also taken a keen interest in the announcement that the number of Health Visitors across Kent is to be cut and liaising with our Health Visitor as to what impact this will have for Staplehurst (as yet this is still not known). As a solicitor, I tend to get asked to help with legal issues which crop up. Councillors are also encouraged to attend conferences/seminars which relate to their role as Councillors and I recently attended one which gave an update on planning matters, changes in government policy, key issues and best practice to do with a whole host of issues.

In addition to our regular monthly meetings and focus groups, councillors often need to find spare time for 'ad hoc' meetings – for example with County or Borough Officers, architects or agents for fact-finding and discussion of issues that the council may form an opinion on. Such meetings don't happen every day (or week), so it's not too time consuming. The bonus is you get to see the detail of what's being considered for your community before anyone else (at least that's the theory).

Being a Parish Councillor does not take over your life (although no doubt it could if you wanted it to) but it does require a regular time commitment for meetings and focus groups and a willingness to muck in and take part in village life.

Do you think you can do better or want to become involved? Well, now is the time as there are elections in May 2007. If you are interested in being a Councillor, please contact our Parish Clerk Sue Bassett for details.

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## Staplehurst Web Site

For those who have not yet dipped into this informative local web site ([www.staplehurstvillage.org.uk](http://www.staplehurstvillage.org.uk)) it is worth the effort. The site was established in July 1999. By the time this 'Village Update' is published the browsers will have totalled almost 90,000! This figure represents those who have opened the Home Page; from that we trust they have also delved into what is on offer. The calls to the site continue on average at 1000 every 8 days!

Callers come from all over the world but, naturally, most from Great Britain; many from the United States. Statistics show that browsers come from all continents - but none from Antarctica (yes, this is in the statistics count) but we might get someone with 'Happy Feet' doing it one day. From the statistics the most popular part of the web site viewed by our friends is The

Staplehurst Society which has its web content contained on the Parish Council site and is easily accessible.

Much about Staplehurst life, and what is available to residents, can be found on the site. You can keep up to date with your Parish Council efforts by looking at the Minutes of recent meetings. You can find out what groups are available in the village, what businesses there are - and much more. A recently added page is 'A Year in the Life of Staplehurst' a series of photographs of village events through the year from 1st September 2006 to 31st August 2007. You can contribute your digital pictures to this page by sending to: [hegggers@doron.demon.co.uk](mailto:hegggers@doron.demon.co.uk) for captioning and placing.

**Enjoy your browsing!**

# 2007 COUNCIL ELECTIONS

Staplehurst Parish Council election to fill the 15 seats will be taking place, together with 1 Borough Council seat currently held by Richard Lusty, on Thursday 3rd May 2007. If you are considering standing for election, please note the Election Timeline below to ensure your nomination is registered by 4th April.

You will need to obtain a nomination pack from Maidstone Borough Council Electoral Registration Office and ensure your name is on the Register of Electors. A copy of the Electoral Register is kept at the Parish Office, but contact Maidstone Borough Council Electoral Registration Office if you are in any doubt, Tel: 01622 602007. Eighteen year olds will also be able to stand for election this year.

A Parish Council Information pack is available from the Parish Office and prospective nominees are strongly encouraged to apply for one and attend Parish Council meetings to gain as much information as possible about what being a Parish Councillor could entail. The accompanying article written by our newest Parish Councillor Georgie Collins will also give you some ideas.

Even if you do not wish to stand for election, all electors have the right to vote for up to 15 people to represent them. An "Election Special" newsletter will be published once nominations have closed, so that all electors will know a little about the people whose names are listed on the ballot paper before arriving at the polling booth. Be informed and use your votes wisely to ensure Staplehurst elects the Parish Council it deserves.

## ELECTION TIMELINE 2007

Monday 26 February	ELECTION INFORMATION EVENING	Monday 30th April	ANNUAL PARISH MEETING 8pm at South Hall,
Tuesday 27 March	NOTICE OF ELECTION	Thursday 3rd May	ELECTION DAY
Wednesday 4th April	CLOSE OF NOMINATIONS	Monday 14th May	FIRST MEETING OF NEW PARISH COUNCIL
Tuesday 10th April	STATEMENT OF PERSONS NOMINATED published at noon		
Wednesday 11 April	CLOSE OF WITHDRAWALS		
Wednesday 25th April	NOTICE OF POLL at 5 pm		

*A Parish Election will only be held if  
16 or more electors are nominated*

## SPEEDWATCH NEWS

Despite the cold weather our band of volunteers have been out and about in Staplehurst with the Speedwatch equipment.

The roads agreed with the police to be monitored are Station Road, Cranbrook Road, Marden Road and Headcorn Road, all in both directions. Our teams have noted 98 vehicles for excess speed, the fastest recorded being over 50 mph on Church Hill. However, the teams have noted how well the majority of drivers

are keeping to the speed limits, which is encouraging as this is the prime purpose of Speedwatch.

Our equipment is also available for hire to other Parish Councils and we already have a partnership with Headcorn. We have 21 trained volunteers who organise themselves into teams and decide when they can operate. There is room for more so please contact the Parish Office on 01580 891761 or email [staplehurst1@btconnect.com](mailto:staplehurst1@btconnect.com) if you would like to join in.

## PARTNERS AND COMMUNITIES TOGETHER - PACT

### KNOW THE PROBLEM PRIORITISE THEM DEAL WITH THEM

On October 5, 2006 the launch was held of the Maidstone Rural Neighbourhood Initiative with the avowed intention of developing neighbourhood policing. It was acknowledged that rural communities have been short-changed in both policing and public services.

The scheme launched at this meeting was PACT which was to be seen as a new way of working WITH the local community on the issues and priorities. The core role is tackling crime and anti social behaviour.

Part of this process would be a questionnaire, police surgeries and an Environmental Visual Audit. This was carried out October 21, 2006 with PC Pennicott and me.

The visual audit identified possible locations around Staplehurst and the information from this and the questionnaire were reported to the public meeting held

November 27, 2006.

From this meeting key issues were carried forward as an action plan:

- 1 Anti social behaviour around Bower Walk and Surrenden Field – high visibility police presence/review CCTV/litter bin
- 2 Nuisance motor vehicles on Lodge Road Industrial Estate – high visibility policing to identify offences
- 3 Dog fouling/litter – identify problem locations/empty overflowing bins
- 4 Speeding – Parish Council to continue Speed Watch and enforcement of speed restrictions by police twice a month

A further meeting in three months was agreed.

*Margaret Arger.*

# Thrown out and dumped

These tyres were abandoned along Five Ash Lane, between Five Oaks Lane and Pagehurst Road. They were first observed on Monday 21st January 07 (obviously an unwanted Christmas present). The area in which they were left is a designated nature zone, protected by European law as a National Nature Reserve. The ditch that runs along this lane provides vital habitat for a diverse amount of wildlife, including Tortoise Shell butterflies, water voles, shrews and provides a feeding ground for barn owls amongst many other flora and fauna.

Unfortunately used tyres do not fall under the Kent Biodiversity Action Plan (KBAP) classification and are therefore not protected under the National Nature Reserves designation.

So where did these alien, invasive species come from? Outer space? Will they suddenly disappear? Who knows? They certainly will not be reclaimed by their errant owner. No, they will be collected, but by Maidstone Borough Council and who will foot the bill for their collection? Yep, you and me.

What is it with people? Residents in and around our community drive out into the rural areas and dump their unwanted possessions on the roadside and in ditches, instead of taking them to a designated disposal site. One wonders about the morals of these people, who selfishly dump their rubbish in the countryside and expect someone else to clear up their mess.

The media bang on about ASBO's and young people acting in an anti social manner, when these individuals go out of their way to dispose of their unwanted articles in a more antisocial manner than a handful of kids hanging about staring at each other.

Hopefully by the time you have read this piece, these abandoned tyres will have been removed, together with anything else dumped in the interim. However, as spring is upon us, the annual village clean up is about to begin and a large number of fantastic volunteers from our community will be out and about to collect up any remaining litter and rubbish dumped in our Parish. Hopefully, the usual miscreants will be named and shamed into proper action by this community that cares and unwanted white goods, builder's rubble, car parts, garden waste, bags of used nappies etc., will be taken to a registered disposal site instead of spoiling the countryside.

The day will come when the perpetrators of such disgusting and inappropriate dumping will be caught! Community action will help catch criminals - report them!



## CHANGES TO TICKET OFFICE OPENING HOURS

Southeastern has completed a review of office opening hours (under its obligations) and proposes to change the opening hours of ticket offices at Staplehurst on 2nd April. The changes are summarized as follows:

	Days	Current		Proposed	
		Open	Close	Open	Close
Staplehurst	Mon - Fri	05:40	20:22	06:00	19:00
	Saturday	08:15	15:09	08:00	14:40
	Sunday	07:10	14:40	08:10	14:40

## 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](mailto:staplehurst1@btconnect.com)

The Parish councillors are Margaret Arger (Chairman), Joan Buller, Paul Butcher, Barry Franks (Vice-Chairman), Wendy Green (Planning Committee Chair), Paul Kelly, Angela Knowlden, Trevor Martin (Amenities Committee

Chair), Roger Munn, John Reardon, Chris Rogers, Georgie Collins, John Stewart, John Swannick and Donald Wood.

Parish Council Surgeries are held at the Library on the last Saturday of each month, from 10am to 12pm. A Parish Councillor, Richard Lusty (our Borough Councillor), or Chris Lomax (Community Warden) and/or Marc Pennicott (our Community Police Officer) attend, and are willing to talk over any problems.