

Village Update

WINTER 2007

ALLOTMENTS UNDER THREAT

Staplehurst Parish Council had been desperately trying to secure the future of allotments for its 8 allotment holders and another 12 residents on an allotment waiting list, but agreement could not be reached. Maidstone Housing Trust (MHT) has now closed the allotment site. The (unpublicised) transfer of the ownership of the Bell Lane allotment site by Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) to MHT in 2004 was not disclosed to either the Parish Council or allotment holders at the time. MHT says it was not aware that the parcel of land it had purchased comprised allotments and it can therefore do what it wants with the site. MBC has also denied having any knowledge of these allotments which having regard to the fact that the Bell Lane allotments have been in use since the 1970's is very surprising. The Staplehurst allotment holders were granted a licence by MHT in October 2006 to continue use of the allotment until 31

October 2007. However, negotiations for a new licence with MHT became protracted resulting in MHT stating that it would not renew the licence unless Staplehurst Parish Council gave a blanket assurance to MHT that it would agree to MHT's development of the Bell Lane site. The Parish Council simply could not condone a development without going through a proper consultation and planning application procedure, as to do so would be unlawful. The 8 allotment holders have now had to harvest and vacate the allotments they have carefully cultivated for many years. Staplehurst Parish Council continues to search for alternative allotment sites and intends to continue negotiating with both MHT and MBC to ensure that the provision of allotments in Staplehurst will resume. MHT had no current plans or use for the allotment site, but was adamant that the allotment use should discontinue if its demands were not agreed to.

PHASE TWO OF SKATE PARK OPENED

6 October 2007 Skater Liam leaps over the red tape held by Borough Councillor Richard Lusty and County and Borough Councillor Eric Hotson to officially open the second phase of the Staplehurst Skate Park.



Ron Hegarty

Staplehurst

Parish Council



STAPLEHURST PARTNERSHIP HEALTHCHECK

This project follows on from the work done in the Parish with the Village Appraisal 2000 and the Village Design Statement 2004/2005.

The South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) identified Staplehurst as one of 140 communities in the South East that should be eligible for funding under the Agency's Rural Towns Development with 7 million pounds being made available over 7 years. The recommendation for undertaking a 'Market Towns Healthcheck' is that it helps local people to identify the economic, environmental and social strengths and weaknesses of a market town. This helps to identify the impact of changing circumstances and is a sound basis for revitalisation.

The healthcheck consists of a series of worksheets containing questions about environmental, social and economic issues and by answering these questions a vision for the future leads to an action plan. A successful action plan demonstrates that the pressures and opportunities identified in the healthcheck are being

addressed and that projects taken forward complement rather than duplicate initiatives already in place. The present members of the Action Group having covered the worksheets on environment, economy, social and community issues, transport and accessibility now need to consult the community to agree a vision and action plan.

We had hoped to hold our first public meeting in October, as stated in the previous Village Update, but the group did not feel they had sufficient information for this and we apologise for any inconvenience this might have caused.

We are now looking to an online questionnaire being available in the New Year and will be publicising this and inviting you to take part, as well as letting you know how you can be involved even if you are not on the internet. Please contact the Parish Office if you would like to become involved with the Action Group. You would be most welcome.

Councillor Margaret Arger Chairman

MORE STAPLEHURST STREET NAMES

Bathurst Road and Bathurst Close

The Bathurst Road and Close estates were the first big private estates built in the village after the Second World War. They were built by Tickner and Emmerton at the beginning of the 1960's. Originally the estate was going to be called Meadow View, but the then Parish Council changed this to Bathurst Road and Close after the charitable benefactor Lancelot Bathurst. He founded a charity in 1630 where he invested £150 in land which was called 'the School Farm'. The money was to be used to pay for a master to educate 10 local village boys for free. Lancelot Bathurst died in 1639.

Benden Close

Benden Close was built in the mid 1970's on land which was owned by Oaks Farm and Loddenden Manor. Benden Close is part of the Oaks Farm Estate along the Headcorn Road.

Alice Benden was one of the Martyrs of the Marian Persecution commemorated on the monument at Cuckolds Corner. She along with others were condemned to death for their beliefs. Alice was burned at the stake at Canterbury in the cause of Protestantism on 19 June 1557.

Butcher Close

Mr Butcher was headmaster at Staplehurst Primary School from 1938 until 1962. He was very interested in gardening and in 1939 was given permission to extend the school garden. He was a meticulous rotational garden planner and mapped out the gardens to affect the best results. He undoubtedly utilised the gardens during the Second World War in the 'Dig For Victory' campaign. Butchers Close was built in the 1970's by Wimpey developments.

Gybbon Rise

Major John Gybbon set up a charity in 1705. He invested £1661.15/6d for the educating and apprenticing of poor boys. The charity helped many young men in developing their vocational crafts and was instrumental in seeing the reduction in class sizes from 40 pupils to 25. The funds also went towards the salaries for additional teachers, £15 per year for the Boy's school and £10 per year for the Girl's school. In 1939 the fund contributed half the funding for the purchase of a wireless set and aerial.



ACCESS FOR ALL AT STAPLEHURST STATION

The down platform (from London or towards Ashford) at Staplehurst station is reached by a steep and narrow footbridge, which was built when the line was electrified in 1962. This is a particular obstacle to using the train for people who use wheelchairs or have other disabilities and is also awkward for those with pushchairs or even heavy luggage. Some people coming from London to Staplehurst by train have gone on to Headcorn – where the ticket office and car park are on the down side – rather than face the footbridge at Staplehurst. On average, more than a thousand people use the footbridge every day. In March 2006, the Department for Transport announced a programme called 'Railways for All' which aims to increase the number of stations where you can get to the platform without using steps. Staplehurst has been included in the first wave of stations included in this programme and in September Network Rail held a meeting of interested parties – including Staplehurst Parish Council – to explain how they planned to go ahead. A new footbridge will be built to the east of the station building. The bridge will have steps on both sides (facing west) and also lifts 1.6m square which should be large enough for every kind of mobility equipment currently in use in the UK. The stairways and bridge will be covered and lit. The sides will be filled in solidly (to waist height) with mesh and glazing above. In case of problems the lifts will have emergency telephones cascading from the ticket

office at Staplehurst to regional and national control rooms to give 24-hour cover. On the London side the foundation will be about where the present bike rack is and on the Ashford side it will be behind the present platform. The bike rack will be relocated (or replaced if it doesn't stand being moved) and the disabled parking bays will also be moved to make them more convenient for the new bridge. Tactile paving will be provided in areas such as platform edges.

The main structure of the bridge will be fabricated off site and craned into position on the piled foundations over a weekend. There will probably be a few car parking spaces lost in the main car park during work, but most of the plant etc. will be stored in the engineering compound behind the end of the up platform. The estimated time for completing the project is 20-26 weeks and it is hoped to start work by Spring next year. The funding from the Department for Transport covers only the new bridge and incidental works to improve access. Other desirable works such as remodelling the station toilets are not covered by this scheme. The existing concrete footbridge will be left in use as long it does not need expensive repairs so that returning commuters will find it less congested. They will be able to spread out along the train rather than congregating in the seventh carriage!
Councillor Tom Burnham

CHRISTMAS LIGHTS

This year the Parish Council has increased the number of motifs from 20 to 25. The 5 new motifs are stars in keeping with the existing theme. 2 will be placed in Offens Drive and three on Station Road. Each year the Parish Council budgets for costs of approx £3,500 for electricity and maintenance of the display. We are very grateful to all the local businesses that give donations to help. It is through these local businesses and a grant obtained from Borough Councillor Eric Hotson, that the Parish Council has been able to further improve our display. At the time of writing, Parish Councillors are getting ready to erect eight Christmas trees above the shop canopies at the Parade. This will take place on Sunday 25 November. The lights for these trees have also been increased this year.

DISTRIBUTION NEEDED

The Parish Council relies on a team of volunteers to distribute Village Update 4 times a year. Volunteers deliver to all homes that are easily accessible by foot whilst those to homes on the outskirts of the Village are posted. This ensures that every household in Staplehurst receives a copy. Although the Parish Council has a good, dedicated team of volunteers, I am appealing for 'fresh legs' to come forward to help. The main areas we need help with are Hurst Close, Newlyn Drive, Fishers Close, Fishers Road and The Lime Trees estate. You do not have to commit to every edition of update and it is up each individual to decide which roads they can help with. If you are interested in joining our team of volunteers in 2008 please contact Maria Norris, Assistant Parish Clerk on 891761 or at staplehurst1@btconnect.com.

VILLAGE CENTRE AGM

The AGM of the Village Centre management committee is to be held on February 26th 2008 at 8pm in the South Hall.

HEALTH CENTRE

A Public Meeting is being held in All Saints Parish Church by the West Kent Primary Care Trust to assess local residents' views on the tendering process for the taking over of the running of the Staplehurst Health Centre. 7pm December 5th 2007.

MY FIRST SIX MONTHS AS A PARISH COUNCILLOR

I only moved to Staplehurst in October last year and by May the following year I found myself on the Parish Council so, it has been quite a fast learning curve! However, I am not a complete newcomer as I have lived in Kent nearly all my life and I am very familiar with the Maidstone area having worked on the Reed site at Aylesford; although I have to say it has changed out of all recognition from my day. Having recently retired from my full time job I felt that joining the Parish Council would enable me to utilise my experience and put something back into the local community. In addition, although I say this with a certain amount of caution, someone coming in from outside can sometimes see things from a different perspective. All new Councillors tend to find themselves on two of the main Committees of the Parish Council, namely the Planning and Amenities Committees. I am also on the Finance Committee where I have become involved in reviewing the financial controls and liaising with the Internal Auditor appointed by the Parish Council. This is important work and is an area where with a background in economics and finance I feel I can make an early contribution.

For a newcomer like me the work of the Planning Committee is of great interest, not the least because one quickly needs to know the layout and structure of the village. In this respect I also found delivering issues of the Village Update another good way of getting to know the various highways and by-ways of the Parish. Another useful way of getting to grips with local issues is to attend the local "surgeries" held on Saturday mornings in the public library. This provides a very good opportunity to meet people and to tackle possible problems and concerns head on.

So, what have I learnt so far? Well, firstly, Staplehurst is not really a village. It is a vibrant community of 6000+ with an interesting mix of people including those who are either retired, locally employed or regular commuters to London: having a fast mainline rail link to London provides an added dimension. Secondly, despite the significant increase in population, there remains a strong sense of community spirit. This is particularly reflected in the number of active societies in the community and in the web site which continues to receive record numbers of hits. Staplehurst also has an excellent Primary School which Councillor Spearink and I visited in our capacity as new Parish Councillors. I was very impressed with how the school has progressed and what is being achieved. Of course no place is 100% perfect. Having the A229 running right through the centre doesn't exactly help and the parade of shops is unlikely to win any architectural awards! But, many issues such as local employment, affordable housing and provision of facilities and opportunities for young people are not confined solely to Staplehurst.

As I have already highlighted, this is my first six months, so I am still on a very steep learning curve; but, I have found it extremely interesting; even the two hour training session at Maidstone Town Hall on the New Code of Conduct for Councillors! Parish Councils are after all the first tier in our democracy and with their closeness to local issues should have a key role to play. I am extremely grateful to the other members of the Parish Council and to the Parish Clerk for their support and encouragement; this is much appreciated.

Councillor John Perry

ALAN RIMMER 1938 - 2007



It was with great sadness that the Parish Council learnt the news of Allan's death and our sincere condolences go to Sue and the family.

I must have met Allan soon after he and Sue moved to the village when Allan became a member of the Staplehurst Society. Right from the beginning he was

itching to be involved in everything with a keen wit and a kind word. With the Society he arranged talks, trips and activities and in particular the visit which sticks in my

mind was to Tumblers, when it was a bird sanctuary, where a large turkey called Onion, or was it Sage, became very enamoured with Allan causing much laughter, especially from Allan!

Allan was knowledgeable on a wide range of subjects and meetings ranged far and wide in the topics under discussion whilst we sat in the garden or in the house, usually with a glass in hand.

If you needed someone to take on a project Allan was always there. You only have to think of Carnival and Fete, the History Group, Creative Staplehurst, the Village Centre and Christmas at the Parade and this year at the Scouts AGM Allan took on the role of secretary. All you ever had to do was ask Allan. We will miss him.

Councillor Margaret Arger Chairman

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

Council Surgeries are held at the Library on the last

Saturday of each month, from 10am to noon. 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.