

Village Update

SUMMER 2006

STAPLEHURST SKATERS GRANTED £30,000

A successful bid by Maidstone Borough Council, via the Local Authority Business Growth Incentive Scheme, has resulted in Staplehurst Skaters being awarded £30,000 towards a skate park facility on the Jubilee Field.

The skaters with the backing of the Parish Council have already raised nearly £4,000 towards the project which could a phased development starting this year.

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING - 31st MAY 2006 8 pm - South Hall, Staplehurst Village Centre.

ILLEGAL PARKING IN STAPLEHURST

Kent Police has recently received an unacceptable number of complaints relating to parking in Staplehurst. The majority of complaints relate to the parking of motor vehicles on footpaths. Not only is this anti social but stops them being used legitimately by the persons they are designed for, i.e. pedestrians and must stop.

Please note that if you park your vehicle in the following manner then you could be subject to a fine and in certain circumstances your vehicle will be removed.

1. Causing an unnecessary obstruction (contrary to Regulation 103 of the Road Vehicles Regulations 1986). This will include parking on the footpath without leaving sufficient space to allow pedestrians to pass or parking in the road without leaving enough room for vehicles to pass.

2. Driving otherwise than on a road (contrary to Section 34 of the Road Traffic Act 1988). It is an offence to drive on a footpath. The only exception is when driving across the footpath to reach private land i.e. a driveway.

I would strongly advise that those persons parking their vehicles in this manner refrain from doing so or face the possibility of fines and vehicle removal being enforced.

If you wish to speak to me regarding parking or any other matter then I can be contacted on 07980770575 or marc.pennicott@kent.pnn.police.uk.

Thank you in advance for resolving this matter.

PC Marc Pennicott

Rural Partnership Officer for Staplehurst and Marden



Parish Clerk Sue Bassett receiving a bouquet from Parish Council Chairman Margaret Arger to celebrate 10 years as clerk.

At the meeting of Parish Council, held on Monday March 20, Sue Bassett was surprised to have her ten years as Clerk rewarded with the presentation of a rose bush and bouquet of flowers by the Chairman, Margaret Arger.

Most of the Councillors were present together with two former Chairmen of the Council, John Cramp and Robin Oakley, both having received the support of Sue during their terms of office.

Staplehurst

Parish Council



Staplehurst Health Centre

Building work is progressing well on the new Health Centre, with everything looking on course for completion by late Autumn 2006.

Tim Fletcher, Project Manager said; "The necessary steelwork to fit the first floor arrived in early May and we hope to have the building water tight by early July. The team are working hard to ensure that the road behind the shops is kept clear of mud from the lorries and there is minimal disruption to local residents."

The new Health Centre will provide the base for the local GP services at Rose Cottage Surgery, as well as a range of other local community health services.

Work on the school hall is due to begin at the end of July.

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

The Parish councillors are Margaret Arger (Chairman), Paul Butcher, Joan Buller, Barry Franks (Vice-Chairman), Wendy Green (Planning Committee Chair), Paul Kelly, Angela Knowlden, Trevor Martin (Amenities Committee Chair), Roger Munn, Lin Plant, John Reardon, Chris Rogers, 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 Eric Hotson (Borough and County Councillor), Chris Lomax (Community Warden) and/or Marc Pennicott (our Community Police Officer) attend, and are willing to talk over any problems.

Churchyard Extension Consecrated

The Rt Rev Graham Cray, Bishop of Maidstone visited the parish church of All Saints on Saturday, March 11. The purpose was to consecrate the extension of the burial ground in the churchyard in a short service at the site at 10am. Refreshments followed in the church using the new kitchen which is part of the now familiar 'West End Project' that was recently completed.



Pictures courtesy of the Kent Messenger Group

Only Nine Parish Clerks since 1894!

Staplehurst Parish Council was among the first established under the Local Government Act of 1894 and held its first meeting in December of that year. In those 112 years it has only had nine 'Clerks to the Parish Council'.

The first was Mr. Thomas Reeves who served for 37 years, the longest of all - so far!

He was succeeded by a Mr. Curtis who, when offered the salary of £10 a year, asked for £36, which the Parish Council refused. He became the Clerk who recorded the shortest term of office - one meeting! Mr. F. Unicom Brooks took over, having been Chairman for two years, and he completed 25 years. The first lady clerk then came on the scene, Mrs. Delavel who scribed for 3 years.

Still with us in the village is the next resident to hold the office, Peter Day who served the Council for ten years before standing down due to professional commitments.

Then followed a period where the Clerkship rested in one household for over 22 years. James Dowswell held the post for six and a half years. After resigning the Clerkship, James became an elected Parish Councillor.

He handed the books to his wife Janet who reigned for the next 16 years - both conducting Parish Council business from their own home.

Then came Roger Nicholls who spent just over five years in the hot seat - and an office was gained for him. He had as his assistant the present Parish Clerk Sue Bassett.

Sue is the ninth Clerk to Staplehurst Parish Council, the third lady to hold the office. Last year she was instrumental in gaining the Quality Parish Council nomination for the Staplehurst council, the fourth in Kent to achieve that status.

Well done Sue - now try to beat Thomas Reeves long record!

You can find Sue in The Parish Office, Staplehurst Village Centre, each day of the week except her day off, Thursday, and, of course, Saturday and Sunday, from 9 to 11am if you wish to call about something that concerns you about Staplehurst. She spends much more time there, busy nowadays with the use of her computer, telephone and fax links - a far cry from those far off days of pen, ink and letters in 1894.

A day in the life of the Clerk

One day in the life of a Parish Clerk is too small a parameter within which to confine the myriad of roles and responsibilities that a Clerk is expected to fulfil. The dictionary definition of a Clerk is described as “A person who works in an office performing such tasks as keeping records, attending to correspondence and filing.” Whilst this description may have been accurate for some of my predecessors (and does remain a basic part of my work today) the past 10 years in particular have witnessed great improvements in the speed, variety and complexity of Parish Council work.

As for any business, the main reasons for this progress can be attributed to the “information superhighway” or internet that has become an integral part of most people’s lifestyle today and also in response to the “compensation culture” we now live in. A vast majority of Parish Council communication with local residents, other Councils and business is now conducted by email. Although this has great benefits of speed a paper trail is still necessary to prove that a job has been done in accordance with the myriad of guidelines and legislation imposed by government. This is particularly true in the administration of Playscheme and any other project in the public arena. Information about the Parish Council is displayed for the world to see on the website at www.staplehurstvillage.org.uk

Despite many modern-day trappings that are found in the Parish Office today, the life of the Clerk remains essentially the same as it has always been – very varied! Every day is different and although I do have regular cycles of work and deadlines to meet I can never be entirely sure what issue will arise next.

As the key turns to unlock the Parish Office door each morning, my mind calls into sharp focus the “to do” list that has been running through my mind during my walk to work. New items are added as the emails and answerphone messages are downloaded and action is taken to deal with the most urgent. Some items (involving expenditure or important decisions) are added to the next available Agenda for Councillors to consider but others can be answered directly, usually from local knowledge or experience. Many enquiries that reach the Parish Office, either in person or by other means, are not the direct responsibility of the Parish Council, but my assistant and I try to point the enquirer (hopefully) in the right direction.

The Parish Office is also the place where residents call to view planning applications, obtain free dog waste bags and purchase green sacks for garden waste. The latter often involves a resentful grumble about the cost, particularly when the green sack is sometimes hurled into the back of the ordinary refuse lorry for landfill rather than a separate lorry for composting. If the resident is interested we will try to

explain MBC’s reasoning for this but I also make a mental note to add a website FAQ’s page. One day I might find the time to actually write this!

Time! How quickly the day passes at the Parish Office! As well as visits and telephone enquiries by local residents, newspaper, radio and TV reporters and other authorities, I also have regular visits by some Parish Councillors to discuss the progress of Council decisions. Councillor liaison outside of formal meetings is helpful to ensure the desired outcomes are achieved.

As well as general office work, a Clerk also needs to employ skills in project management, financial control and reporting to ensure that everything the Parish Council has agreed to do actually becomes a reality in accordance with legislation. Afternoons are the time we usually get down to more detailed work which can include preparing tenders, record keeping, accounts, budget and audit work, website updating, writing up Minutes and putting into action the agreed work, preparations for the next meeting and arranging additional meetings with other bodies such as Kent Highways, Maidstone Borough and others. There is never a dull moment in the Parish Office.

Some days for the Clerk can be very long, particularly if there is a formal Council meeting that evening. I do try to finish early at the office on meeting days before returning later, fully refreshed, to guide the Council through the issues before it and minuting the decisions made.

Unfortunately and despite all the information available, public perception still takes a while to catch up with reality. I was mortified recently when the Parish Council was described as being akin to The Vicar of Dibley! Having obtained Quality Parish status last year, the Parish Council has been officially recognised as conducting its business in the approved manner. Local Electors have the legal right and are very much encouraged to attend Parish Council meetings to see for themselves how decisions are made and to ask questions if they wish. I sincerely hope that the jokers who think the Parish Council is a joke will take the trouble to understand the hard work that is being done on behalf of residents by the elected Parish Councillors.

Parish Council Elections are due in May 2007 and I am already working to ensure that sufficient candidates are encouraged to stand for election. Are you one of these perhaps? There are plenty of different ways you can find out about what being a Parish Councillor could involve - and I look forward to hearing from you either in person or by other electronic media.

*Sue Bassett
Parish Clerk*

PLAYSCHEME UPDATE

An excellent and dynamic team of staff is now in place ready to offer supervised play opportunities for 5-11 year olds for three weeks in the summer holidays. Several of last year's successful team have returned because they enjoyed Playscheme so much and will be joined with a few fresh faces ready with new ideas.

Booking forms will soon be available on the Parish Council Website at www.staplehurstvillage.org.uk or from the Parish Office, Staplehurst Library and Primary School. Playscheme will open on Monday 31st July at 0930-1230 Mondays to Fridays until Friday 18th August 2006.

Beaver Scouts in Staplehurst – their future?

After many years in their role the present Beaver Scout Leader and her supporting team have decided it is time hang up their "woggles"!

Over the years they have provided many hours of "fun and friendship" for the youngsters in the Colony.

This means that exciting vacancies have occurred and therefore it is **YOUR** opportunity to become involved. Helping young people can be one of the most fun and rewarding things you can do!

It is appreciated that everyone's time is at a premium but surely you can and want to spare for hours a week. No previous experience is required but you **want** to

work with a group of 6 to 7 year olds with a small team of similar minded adults. Full training, induction and on going support is given.

What matters is that you committed, have a sense of fun and humour and a modicum amount of common sense to help the young people develop as responsible members of society.

YOUR help is required **NOW** as a leader or helper.

All you need to do initially is to make one phone call to Geoff Smith, the Group Scout Leader, on 01580 852684 or alternatively e-mail him at geoffreysmith@hotmail.com

WHY DOES ONE BECOME A PARISH COUNCILLOR?

An interesting question as to why one would wish to lift one's head above the parapet and filled with all sorts of answers from the glib "it seemed like a good idea at the time" to the "wanting to give something back to the community", and I expect if the truth were known, the reason falls somewhere between the two.

For me it was because having attended meetings as a member of the general public for several years, it had got very lonely sitting on my own!

However, the really scary part is election night, seeing the votes being counted and wondering how people decide to cast their vote, why they voted for you as you don't know that number of people, and being humbled by the trust being shown.

Margaret Arger.

STAPLEHURST LIBRARY

After several months in the Village Centre, the Library re-opened after its refurbishment.

The welcoming automatic doors open into the entrance foyer with comfortable seating and a coffee machine.

Users have commented on the light and spacious new-look and are delighted to find many new books. We are pleased to see this valuable asset being widely used.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

There is a hosepipe ban in place until further notice for all domestic customers.

On average, we each use 165 litres of water every day for all our domestic needs:

Flushing the toilet	=	45 litres
Personal washing and bathing	=	50 litres
Drinking/cooking	=	15 litres
Laundry	=	25 litres
Cleaning / dishwashing	=	20 litres
Garden watering / washing cars	=	10 litres

Join us in a partnership to help save water - small changes to your daily routine can result in big savings.

- Don't leave the tap running when you brush your teeth. A family of four could save a bathful of water a day.
- Fix any dripping taps. A dripping tap can waste 25 litres a day.
- Take a shower instead of a bath. The average shower uses 30 litres of water but a bath uses 80 litres.
- Fit a water butt in the garden to collect rain water. Plants prefer rain water.

For further information on the total hosepipe ban you can visit our website at www.midkentwater.co.uk or call our customer helpline on **0845 850 60 60**.