

# Village Update

SPRING 2004

## Welcome to the first edition of Village Update

This plans to be a regular newsletter bringing you news and information on what your Parish Council is achieving on your behalf and will enable the Council to embrace the philosophy of open government.

Your 15 duly elected members have been working hard during its first year to be proactive and to be seen as responding to the many and varied concerns of the parish.

The Council has three main committees Planning, Amenities and Finance. Planning and Amenities meet every first Monday of the month and Planning and full Council meet every third Monday and are open to the general public who have the opportunity to speak at the end of the meeting. The Finance Committee meets quarterly and presents its recommendations to full council.

We also have an Annual Parish Meeting which enables all local organisations to give reports on their activities to the Parish. If you would like to speak please contact our Parish Clerk without whom we could not function.

You are cordially invited to attend.

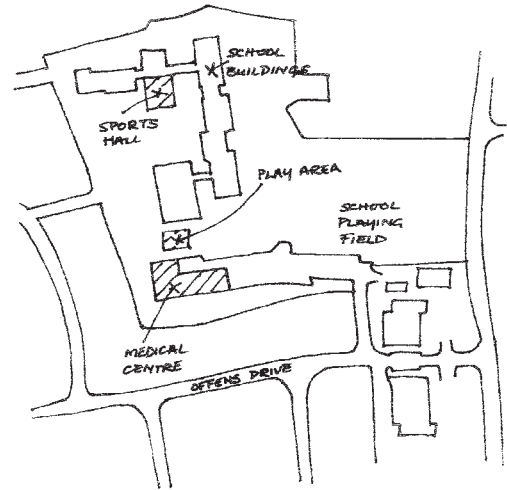
I have been privileged to be Chairman and commend your Parish Council for all their hard work and commitment.

*Margaret Arger*

## Village Design Statement

The Village has grown, in a piece meal fashion over the years and presently The Parish Council are working with The Staplehurst Society to create a Design Statement that will enable us to influence the design of future developments. We held an open meeting and created working parties to study all aspects of the subject.

## Staplehurst Medical Centre



After much consultation a planning application for a two storey purpose built medical centre has been agreed. The only site that was deemed suitable and acceptable to the planning authority is on part of the Primary School playing field. It is hoped that the first sod will be dug at the beginning of April.

## Policing and Crime

A CCTV camera for 24/7 surveillance has now been installed at The Parade. Staplehurst is fortunate to have the dedicated services of Parish Warden, Chris Jones (Tel: 07811 271254) who has back up from KCC and Kent Police Rural Partnership Scheme. Crime statistics for Staplehurst have reduced over the past year.

# Staplehurst

*Parish Council*

# Planning Update for Staplehurst

## *Councillor Wendy Green-Chair of the Planning Committee*

Planning is a fickle science, on the one hand you can be dealing with the run of the mill conservatories or side extensions and on the other be dealing with a major supermarket, the NHS or providing burial space for the future.

Throughout the past year Staplehurst Parish Council Planning Committee have been consulted on 95 planning applications and with each one we offer our unbiased opinions. We have to adhere to planning policy guidelines that have been set down in the Kent Structure Plan and the Local Maidstone Borough Wide Plan. These guide lines help to determine the feasibility of each project.

This is not an easy task, many people believe that we just look at a set of plans and decide if we like the look of it or not, in fact we have to make sure that any project will not have a detrimental effect on the harmony of its neighbourhood. Considerations such as the impact on the street scene are very important points that must be debated.

Last summer the residents of Staplehurst were hit by two big projects which could change the face of the village, one was the controversial Tesco Supermarket application with the upgrade of the railway car park

and the other equally as controversial a new medical centre sited on part of the Primary School Playing Field.

The Tesco's supermarket chain submitted an application for a 3356sqm store to be sited on what is a present the unofficial overflow car park. A glossy display was mounted and lots of strange faces were seen around the place, gossip was rife on what we were being offered. There were two camps of opinion, one saying that it would be the best thing that could happen to the village and the other camp saying that the disruption that such a large development would cause would be detrimental to the countryside to the north of the village and would cause an unwelcome increase in traffic through the village. The whole project is still at the consultation stage with the Borough and any decision will be made by them in the future.

For many years the Parish Council has been looking for a suitable site for an extension to the Parish church burial ground and the only site that has been found to be acceptable is to the south west of the existing ground. After much negotiation we have managed to gain planning permission and preparation of the site will take place in due course.

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## Surrenden Field Project

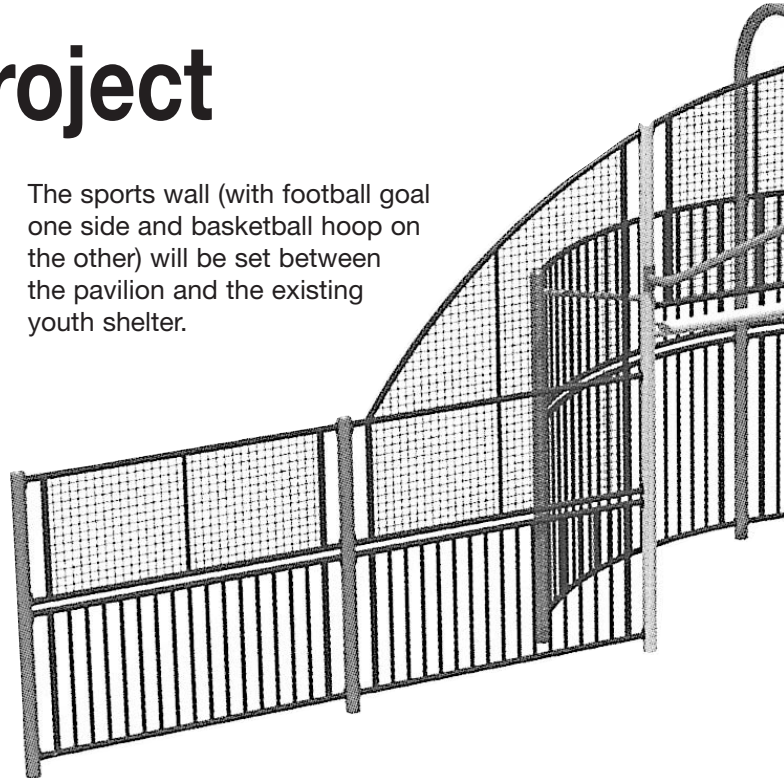
The Staplehurst Youth Forum, in conjunction with the Parish Council, has been busily working towards upgrading recreational facilities on Surrenden Field.

In August of 2003, we applied to Living Spaces for a grant to cover half of the cost of the project (£54,000+). In January of 2004, our application for these funds was approved. Matching funds have been generously donated by: Staplehurst Parish Council (£45,000), KCC/Kent Police Rural Partnership (£9,500 for a new Sports Wall), The Newlyn Trust (£1,500) and Staplehurst Masonic Lodge (£200).

SMP Playgrounds Ltd have been awarded the contract to supply the equipment: Babtie Group will act on our behalf as contract managers. Work will commence in May, with completion in mid-June. We hope to have the site ready for a grand opening at the Carnival and Fete on 26th June.

The playground will have two multi-function towers, to accommodate varying age groups from toddlers to 12 year olds. New swings, a roundabout (suitable for disabled), a balance beam, stepping-stones, and small springers will be installed. Everything will brightly coloured. An added attraction will be a new safety surface with graphics, including games such as snakes and ladders and hopscotch.

The sports wall (with football goal one side and basketball hoop on the other) will be set between the pavilion and the existing youth shelter.



This will provide a positive recreational area for young people - in keeping with new government guidelines encouraging outdoor play activities for children of all ages.

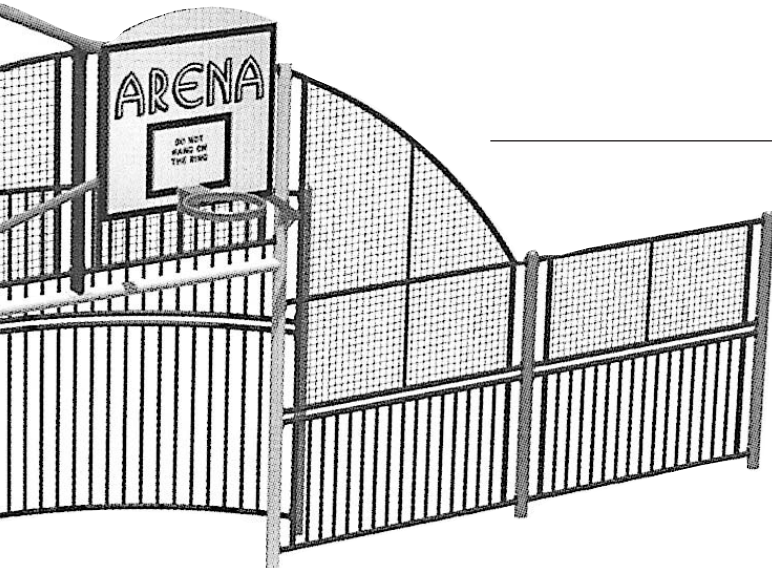
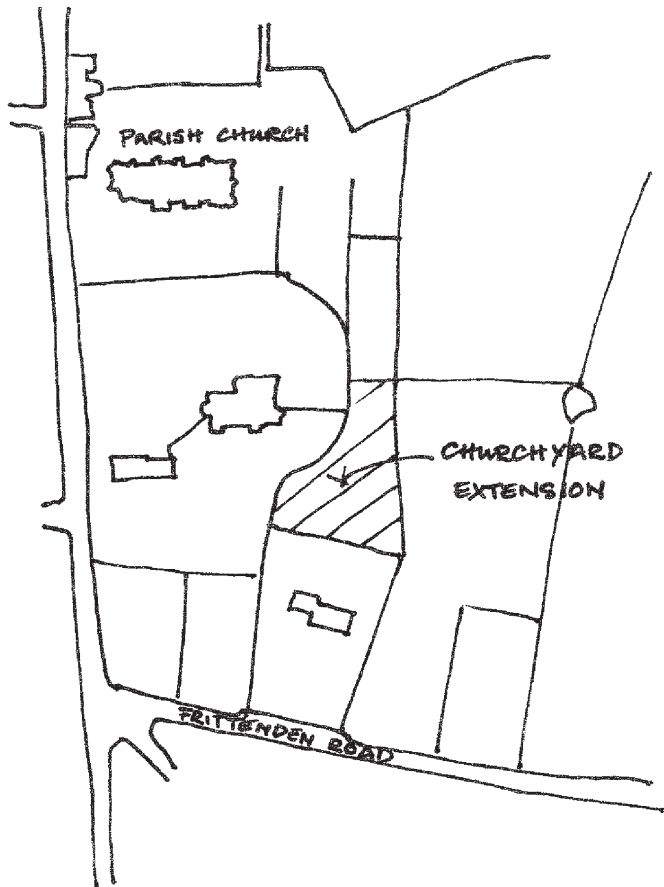
New benches will be installed, both inside the playground and around the perimeter of the field,

# Village of the year

As many of you will know, Staplehurst won the Kent section of the Calor Village of the Year competition. The six Regional finalists and the National finalist were announced at an awards luncheon on 9th December. Unfortunately Staplehurst did not receive any awards beyond having already won the County Competition. The two trees that were received as prizes have now been planted at the Jubilee Playing field. A number of certificates and a map of Kent were also received, which are currently displayed at the Parish Office, and may later be displayed in Staplehurst Library. Well done to all those who assisted and supplied information for the competition, your efforts were much appreciated by the Parish Council.

During the Judges visit in October 2003, it was not necessarily how much we had achieved so far that impressed them, but how we were currently dealing with problem issues that were affecting residents' quality of life. The winning Villages were those that did not expect "others" to deal with their own local issues.

Taking community action for one's own community is what binds local people together to create results that are needed and valued by the community. We should all now be asking ourselves "what can we do to make Staplehurst a better place for us to live?" rather than expecting "others" to improve things for us. Volunteers are always wanted for many projects in the village; please contact any organisation you are interested in, or the Parish Clerk for helping with Parish Council projects.



and new pathways will also be provided - linking the High Street entrance across to Surrenden Road; up to Bower Walk.

A "Friends of Surrenden Field" group is being set up. The 'Friends' will not only act in a care-taking capacity - ensuring the safety and security of the site - but also arrange special activity days and events. If you would like to take an active part in this initiative please contact the Parish Clerk (01580-891761) for details.



Finally, The Staplehurst Youth Forum would like to take this opportunity to thank all the organisations and individuals who have contributed to this project. In particular, we would like to thank: Living Spaces, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, Groundwork UK, the Urban Parks Forum, Maidstone Borough Council's Environmental Support Services, Staplehurst Parish Council, The Newlyn Trust, Staplehurst Masonic Lodge, Kent County Council/Kent Police Rural Partnership and the Rural Community Warden Scheme.

# Rail Users' Forum

The Village Plan intends to put the Parish Council at the hub of a network of village groups representing broad cross-sections of our population. Those for whom the Station are an important part of life are a sizeable group currently under-represented in Village life.

The term Rail Users' Forum inadequately covers wider issues - station traffic and parking, the Sunday market and development of the station site. 40 people attended a first meeting on March 11.

The current Strategic Rail Authority consultation on Kent rail services was a dominant theme. The proposals augur drastic cuts in peak-hour services to London Cannon Street. A survey of travellers undertaken jointly by the Parish Council and Rail Passengers' Council in February shows this is against the interests of 60 per cent of daily commuters.

Other key issues discussed included the Tesco development and car park plans. A further meeting is planned on April xx to discuss a draft Parish Council response to the SRA consultation.

Anyone interested in this and the wider issues should contact Cllr John Swannick (01580 890750 e-mail john@swannick1.fsnet.co.uk) for further details.

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## Councillors and the Parish Office

There are currently fifteen Councillors, who make up Staplehurst Parish Council.

Parish Councillors: Margaret Arger (Chairman), Margaret Green, Joan Buller, Amanda Burkby, Paul Butcher, Barry Franks (Vice Chairman), Wendy Green (Chair Planning), Roger Munn, Paul Kelly, Trevor Martin (Chair Amenities), John Stewart, Lin Plant, John Swannick, Donald Wood, Wendy Booker.

Parish Office public opening hours are 9-11am Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays 01580 891761.

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## Neighbourhood Watch

The Neighbourhood Watch Scheme is being reformed in Staplehurst. Anyone wanting further information, or wishing to join, should contact the Parish Warden, Chris Jones, on 07811 271254.

# Action Plan!

From the 50+ points for action that were identified by the Millennium Appraisal the full council have identified and are working on these priorities:-

- Bypass
- Churchyard extension
- Closed Circuit TV
- Jubilee field
- Medical centre
- Policing issues
- Surrenden Playing Field
- Village Newsletter

A small Action Plan Group is leading efforts to bring about:

- Improved Adult Education with KCC
- Improved provision and siting of post boxes with Royal Mail
- A Village Design Statement with Staplehurst Society
- Re-launch of Neighbourhood Watch with the Community Warden
- Founding of a Railway Users' Forum
- Improved School provision
- Encouraging parishioners to maintain their boundaries

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## Jubilee Field

The Parish Council has drawn up plans for the field to be properly drained and new changing rooms built. The cost of these improvements is £365,000 of which the Parish and Borough Councils are able to find £115,000 (31%) and we are submitting an application to the Football Foundation for the shortfall of £250,000.

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## Parish Council Website

The Parish Council has its own website – [www.staplehurstvillage.org.uk](http://www.staplehurstvillage.org.uk) - which contains information about both the Council and village life generally.

It has Visitor Information, Latest News, Parish Council information, and a Local Directory. It also contains links to the Staplehurst Society's website, and to websites of other local villages.

The website has a Village Forum section (monitored regularly for content), which allows villagers to air their views on any topics or publicise local events. This has been heavily used recently, with comments regarding the SRA proposals put forward to change the amount and timing of trains to Staplehurst.

For villagers who wish to be updated regarding developments in the village, the Clerk has set up email groups, whereby villagers can have their names added to an email group to receive information about any specific subject/s they wish. Please contact the Clerk for further details.