**Stapleford Parish Council: Report & Plans for 2021/22**

The first virtual meeting was held on the 13th of May 2020 and the Zoom platform has enabled us to function and engage.

**Finance & Audit**

The Council has faced some significant costs over the last year and will, by carefully cultivating revenue generating activities, seek to move to a balanced budget by 2022. It will also aim to ensure future precept increases are in line with inflation. We will look to rebuild our reserve to 100% of the precept value by the end of 2022.

**Highways & Footpaths**

There has been an encouraging response from the County Council with the resurfacing of the Bury road / Bar Lane junction to a good standard.

Building on this success by April 2022, we intend to inspect all roads & pavements in the village and to seek remedial work where appropriate.

It has finally been established that the street light opposite Chalk Hill on Gog Magog Way was never connected up when installed by the developers in 2009. The Council will continue to press for this to be rectified.

**Planning**

At its meetings each month the Parish Council gives careful consideration to a number of submitted planning applications and makes recommendations to South Cambs District Council.

In addition the Parish Council has engaged in a Local plan consultation ‘Call for Sites’ and commented on proposed changes to the Conservation Area and to the concept of the Cambridge Great Park. Perhaps the most significant planning matter considered was for the Retirement Village on the eastern boundary of Stapleford, with access off Haverhill Road, vigorously opposed by your Council, and unanimously rejected by South Cambs District Council Planning Committee. This was based on the grounds of insufficient special circumstances to merit removing the land from the greenbelt and that a high-end retirement village would not meet local need for affordable accommodation for elderly people. Also recognised was the local significance of the open views from Stapleford to Magog Down and the surrounding landscape.

A vigorous defence of the greenbelt will be maintained by the Parish council against any speculative threats to the valuable land that surrounds the Parish in accordance with the previously drafted policy.

The Council will seek to evaluate all planning requests within its boundaries on a monthly basis and help co-ordinate necessary opposition where any proposals are seen as overly detrimental to neighbours, the village-scape or designated conservation areas.

**Neighbourhood Planning**

Over the coming year the Council will look to have created a ‘Neighbourhood Plan’ that will be put out for consultation and review across the Parish. The Parish Council accepts that this is a necessary part of our arsenal in fighting unwelcome encroachments and speculative development harmful to village life.

**Transport Infrastructure**

Whilst the proposed southern approach route for East West Rail is being actively opposed by Cambridge Approaches, this is not going to impact our Parish, unlike the GCP’s CSET busway. Jointly with Gt Shelford Parish Council and match funded with contributions from a crowdfunder organised by Cambridge Past Present & Future, an independent report has now been published setting out the GCPs failures to adequately consult and to establish a firm business case. We will continue to make representations to the GCP, and engage with all statutory procedures until a proper review of this poorly conceived scheme is agreed to.

**Asset Management**

Amongst a number of initiatives, the grounds maintenance contract has been retendered, as has the electricity contracts for the Pavilion and Slaughterhouse.

The Pavilion has been maintained and redecorated, and a temporary container located on the field for storage.

With Covid protocols applied to the use of the Pavilion at the outbreak of the pandemic, the Council now welcomes the return of people to safely use the facilities of the Pavilion. We will actively work with other authorities to ensure we stay in strict compliance with all safety protocols whilst also exploring ways to expand usage of the facility to the benefit of all in the village. Transparent utilisation reports for the Pavilion will be accessible to the community.

The Council is looking to add outdoor toilet facilities along with improvements to its storage capabilities for sports equipment. This will all be completed by the end of 2021.

Potential enhancements to the Pavilion itself will be proposed by the Council and put to the public for feedback during 2021.

A public consultation on the best use of the Slaughterhouse will also be constructed. Various options exist for this site of historical merit but direct feedback from villagers will be essential in ensuring we align as closely as possible with their desires. Redevelopment plans should be sustainable and not place an undue financial burden on the council.

In order to secure the long term management of the Parish Pit for conservation and biodiversity the ownership of the Parish Pit (off the Haverhill Road and close to Magog Down) will be transferred to the Magog Trust subject to the current public consultation.

**Play Areas and School Liaison**

Over the next year the Parish Council aims to improve the children’s play facilities to the best of its abilities. We will continue to encourage others to give to the fund raising activities and will support initiatives aimed at fund raising in this regard. We understand the final overhaul may take a little longer than 12 months but we are committed to a safe and pleasant facility for the village children to enjoy.

**Cemeteries Management**

New cemetery regulations have been introduced and the new cemetery brought into use with the installation of the pathway, gates, and laying out of plots.

By the end of 2021 the intention is to have all the health and safety issues around unsafe grave stones etc resolved. We also intend for the creation of a remembrance area within the new graveyard site along with some suitable meadow style planting in appropriate areas. The Council will have introduced a memorials policy by then and applicants are welcome to take advantage of this with regards to loved ones interred in the cemetery.

**Police Liaison and Neighbourhood Watch**

If we can see volunteers coming through to support appropriate initiatives then this will be helpful.

**Communications**

A new regime has been introduced with regular postings on Facebook and Twitter and updates on the website coupled with regular articles in the Messenger.

The Parish Council have understood the importance of regular, multi-channel communication both to explain what it is doing but also to seek feedback and advice on what it should do best going forward. This 2-way communication is vital and the village can expect several consultations on how we best invest in our village going forward and help the Parish Council to get its priorities correctly aligned with residents.

**Tech & Technology**

The Parish Council website was installed at the start of last year and by the end of 2021 the website will have been realigned to further improve accessibility.

It will be easier for residents to find the things that interest them most, providing a record, with links via regular Messenger, Facebook and other social media channels so people can be notified on interesting content in a way that best suits them.

**Policy & Scrutiny**

A number of administrative policies have been reviewed and policies will be introduced or revised as appropriate in line with government legislation.

**Human Resources**

A thorough HR review was undertaken resulting in useful savings in cost and good use of our two Clerk’s time.

The village is dependent on volunteers for much of its work, whether this in the organisation of projects or litter picking or maintenance and support to give some examples. This will need to be reviewed as we go forward in order to provide the resource for all we would like to do in the village.

**Environment, Biodiversity & Ecology**

Environmental improvements can come in various guises, large and small. Already a Zero Carbon Grant has been obtained which will enable a survey of the Pavilion. Earlier this year the Sawston cycle route was flooded and volunteers and the Parish Council urged the County Council to rectify, achieving an elevated new section of cycleway.

Over the course of this year the Parish Council will look to develop a plan including large and small initiatives and also seeking to secure access to funding that is increasingly becoming available for such initiatives. Sustainability will also be a key watch-word for our activities and we will look to evaluate all new initiatives and policies in that light, ensuring that we have done things that will lower our carbon foot print, to recycle or re-use wherever possible. The approach of the Council will be put out for public consultation to ensure we get priorities understood.

**Sports Development and Management**

The Multi Space Games Area (MUGA) is now under construction and will provide an excellent facility for a range of sports.

Licenses for the sports clubs

With increased used of the grass based sporting facilities and the launch of the new MUGA in June 2021, the council is cognisant of ensuring that access remains fair to all, and Sports Club licences have been signed.

There is a need to ensure that overuse does not occur potentially damaging surfaces and that new sports like Netball or 5-aside football will need to be nurtured to encourage a wide array of activities with something for everyone at any age.

Good facilities management is highly correlated with good financial management. The council will therefore ensure it keeps reserves dedicated to the replacement costs of facilities at their expected end-of life. It is essential that we do not let recent investments degrade over time. For a small village we have a set of facilities that many might envy and it is important we continue to nurture and invest accordingly. Part of that is active liaison with organised clubs and associations to ensure they understand the standards we are expecting and also so we can partner with them to help grow their sporting activities. The council is committed to the sporting facilities being accessible to all users regardless of ability or income.

**Thanks**

My thanks go to all Councillors who are making all this happen. It wouldn’t be appropriate to single out Councillors but great work has been achieved.

And finally a tribute to Charlie Nightingale who has resigned from the Parish Council having served for many years and also as a District Councillor. Charlie brought knowledge and wisdom to all our deliberations. His period of service to the two Councils is impressive and an example to us all and he will be missed. We wish him well.

Howard Kettel 4/5/21

Chair Stapleford Parish Council