

STAPELEY & DISTRICT PARISH COUNCIL

ANNUAL REPORT – 2011-2012

1 CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION/WORK OF THE PARISH COUNCIL

This report is part of the aim to improve communication between the Parish Council and its residents. The report outlines the activities of the Parish Council itself.

Firstly, I would like to thank my fellow parish councillors for having re-elected me as Chairman, in May 2011, and for their support during the year.

One of the main items of interest for residents will be the **community hall**. We are very disappointed that we have not made more progress. We had hoped to have been in occupation by this time but we are still negotiating on the lease. There are a number of significant concerns about some of the terms and conditions. These have now been conveyed to our Legal Advisers who will take up these matters with Cheshire East Council. As always, we will keep you updated on progress and let you know the outcome.

The **Speed Watch** scheme through the mobile vehicle-speed indicating equipment is proving useful in trying to change driver behaviour in the parish. To date, we have only used it on Broad Lane and London Road, but we have recently upgraded the equipment and purchased additional solar panels so that we can operate the scheme on Peter de Stapleigh Way and some areas of the Cronkinson development.

The **Speed Gun** Initiative which was originally set up by a former parish councillor is now managed by a local resident (Irene Williams). This scheme has fallen into disuse recently but Irene is planning to re-generate the scheme and has arranged a training session for existing and new volunteers, at The Globe on Monday, 14th May at 5.30pm.

The last statistics (April 2012) indicated that 79% of motorists are driving at the speed limit with 6% driving at more than 5 mph over the speed limit. This amounts to 85% or what is known as the "85 percentile speed". Research shows that the safest group of vehicles are travelling at or below the 85-90 percentiles. The 85 percentile speed is recognised by traffic engineers as the optimum level at which to set speed limits and when they are set in accordance with this, it means that the majority of drivers are travelling within the law. Speed limits based on this 85 percentile are set in accordance with the actions of the responsible majority. The converse is also true: if speed limits are set below the 85 percentile speed, they will be largely ignored, even by the safest drivers. Drivers tend to drive to their environment and if a motorist sees a speed limit which appears to be unreasonably low, it will be ignored.¹

We do not have comparator statistics for the period prior to the introduction of this scheme, but our impression is that traffic speeds have reduced considerably. The last three sample periods show a consistency in speed data.

Our partnership with **Cheshire East Council** continues and the two Borough Councillors, Peter Groves and Andrew Martin, attend all our meetings and report on matters of interest relating to Borough Council business and those which will have a significant effect on the parish.

In the last year we have seen the **playground** project completed (an initiative of the Parish Plan Implementation Group which is called "Stapeley Parish Action Group" usually abbreviated to "SPAG") and we were pleased to be able to assist by contributing funding. One of our former parish councillors, Rob Morton, who resigned recently owing to increased business commitments, was very involved in

¹ Association of British Drivers

this project, ensuring that the Parish Council was kept up-dated on progress and was instrumental in securing Parish Council funding for the scheme. His valuable contribution as a parish councillor will be missed.

We have started to try to tackle the “**dog mess**” situation which many of you have complained about. In January we had a “stencilling-day” when volunteers, parish councillors and one of the Ward Councillors targeted certain areas by stencilling the image of a dog (in orange paint) onto footways and in some cases, painting the faeces themselves to try to encourage the few non-responsible dog owners to remove their dog’s mess and take it home or put it into a dog-waste bin.

Diamond Jubilee: We had planned to organise a parish event to mark the Diamond Jubilee in June, and had been awarded a small amount of funding from the Borough Council. However, Nantwich Town Council has organised a variety of events over the bank holiday weekend and Members have agreed that in view of this, there might not be sufficient interest in arranging our own event. The Town Council has kindly agreed that we can participate and I have been appointed as one of the Members of its Diamond Jubilee Working Group. We are hoping that school pupils from the two primary schools will be able to participate in the Nantwich events.

As a Parish Council we have funded the cost of a commemorative coin to be provided to each school pupil at Stapeley Broad Lane School and Pear Tree School and we hope that this will serve as a lasting reminder of this historic occasion.

Community Carols: We held our first community event on 21 December 2011 on the Cronkinson pub site. It was arranged at very short notice, but was a great success. The Nantwich and District Band played seasonal music and the Cronkinson Pub allowed us to use its facilities so that we could serve refreshments after the service. We are planning to hold another such event this year on Thursday, 20 December 2012 at 6.00 pm (venue to be advised).

Bulb planting: We carried out our usual bulb-planting on Broad Lane, Pear Tree Field and Peter de Stapleigh Way. Each year, the Borough Council provides 1000 Spring bulbs to each town and parish council in its area and parish councillors and volunteers from SPAG helped to plant them.

The following is a broad outline of the **Council’s plans** for the coming year:

- Provide new dog-waste bins
- Hold quarterly Public Debates
- Community Carols – December
- Assist in enhancing the playground at Pear Tree Field
- Improve communication with local residents
- Consider the introduction of “welcome packs” for new residents
- Prepare a 5-year Plan for the Parish

2. PARISH COUNCIL

The Parish Council plays a vital role in representing local issues and helping to improve the quality of life for parishioners. It provides the opportunity for people to influence decisions which touch their lives and provides a “conduit” to the Borough Council.

Parish Council members are volunteers elected or co-opted to serve for a period of up to four years. The full complement of Members is ten, but at the moment, we have eight. They are a diverse group of individuals, all of whom are very enthusiastic and keen to represent the interests of local residents despite their own (sometimes pressing) business and personal commitments. Some of the Members have special interests and have taken the initiative to lead on certain projects; for example, Mike Docker and Keith Nord (Speed Watch); Jo Hillman and Raj Samra (Website re-design). We have recently co-opted new Parish Councillor, Shaun Clough, who has a background in local government; in particular, in audit matters and we are sure that his experience will be of value to the Parish Council.

Those listed below were either elected or co-opted and will serve until to the date of the next election which is 2015.

Sandy Gwinn-Freemantle (Chairman)	Raj Samra (Vice-Chairman)
Shaun Clough	Mike Docker
Maxine Galt	Jo Hillman
Keith Nord	James Wood

3. THE PARISH COUNCIL'S ROLE IN PLANNING

One of the main consultative roles of parish councils, and of great importance, is to comment on local planning applications which may have a positive or detrimental impact on the community. The broad aim of the Parish Council in terms of planning is to keep Stapeley and Batherton a pleasant place to live avoiding inappropriate development.

Residents have recently expressed their concerns about proposals for building in Stapeley, on the former Stapeley Water Gardens site, and also, a little further afield, Kingsley Fields, Nantwich, which will also have an impact on this area. These views, which have been echoed by the Parish Council, have been forwarded to the Borough Council.

Applications can be for new-build, extensions, or larger developments. The Parish Council is a consultee only and those directly affected by a proposal will also have been consulted. The Parish Council's views are taken into account by the Borough Council and it is the Borough Council, as the Planning Authority, which will make the decision. Comments must be made on planning grounds only, and these include –

- The proposed development in terms of size, location and design is in keeping with the character of existing properties, the street scene and the surrounding area.
- There is no over-development of the plot.
- The proposed development does not have an overshadowing or overbearing effect on neighbouring properties.
- Potential land contamination or flooding has been taken into account.
- Effect on highway safety and parking.

If an application is refused, or has not been determined, within a set period, there is usually a right of appeal by the applicant and this is made to the First Secretary of State in England. The Planning Inspectorate administers these appeals.

Strategy for Nantwich:

At its June 2012 meeting, the Parish Council was due to discuss the possibility of preparation of a neighbourhood plan, which is a new power given to town and parish councils under the Localism Act 2011. However, the Parish Council has now been asked to participate in the "Strategy for Nantwich" process which is being facilitated by Cheshire East Council and this will be considered at the June meeting.

Cheshire East Borough Council has recently produced town strategy documents for Alsager, Congleton, Middlewich and Sandbach as part of the preparation of the Cheshire East Local Plan. These documents are now out for public consultation. For anyone interested in viewing these draft Town Strategies, they can be accessed through the following web link:

http://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/environment_and_planning/planning/spatial_planning/cheshire_east_local_plan/local_plan_consultations/town_strategies.aspx

Strategies are now required for the remaining towns in Cheshire East, including Nantwich, and the Borough Council has asked Nantwich Town Council to take a lead role in setting up a Stakeholder Panel to develop this strategy. The strategy will, of course, relate to areas beyond the town council boundaries and Cheshire East expects the Panel to reflect a wide range of community interests from within the town and beyond.

The Parish Council has been asked to nominate two parish councillors to become Members of that Panel and this decision will be made at the Annual Meeting on 3 May 2012. Once the Panel is formed Cheshire East Council will organise the first of two half-day workshop sessions to discuss the main issues. After the second workshop, the Panel will present its findings to a special meeting organised by Cheshire East Council and the Town Council before the strategy is released for public consultation.

4. MEETINGS

The Parish Council meets monthly, on the first Thursday. Meetings are usually held at Broad Lane Methodist Chapel at 7.30 pm. We try to hold two of these meetings each year at the local schools to try to encourage greater attendance by the public.

Last year, in addition to our monthly meetings, we held some special meetings to allow members of the public to have an input or provided a specific “public participation slot” at the ordinary meetings; on 15 September 2011 we met to discuss the Local Development Plan; on 1 December we had a public participation slot at the beginning of the meeting to allow residents to comment on the budget proposals, and during the course of the year, we held four special/informal meetings to allow us to have more detailed discussion on a number of issues before presenting them formally to the Parish Council.

5. PUBLIC DEBATES

As you will have read in your newsletter, we have introduced quarterly public debates in response to comments from members of the public that they wanted more of an opportunity to speak to the Parish Council. The first debate is to be held on 17 May at Pear Tree School, commencing at 7.30 pm and concluding at approximately 9.00 pm. We hope that this will be well-attended and if so, we will be keen to arrange another debate, probably September, after the summer holidays.

6. PARISH PLAN

It is the job of the Parish Plan Implementation Group, known as “Stapeley Parish Action Group” (SPAG) to put into effect all those plans which have been identified as important to the community. The Plan has recently been refreshed and the Group is currently very active. One of its key achievements last year was the playground on the corner of Pear Tree Field/Peter de Stapleigh Way. It is proving to be a great community attraction and there are more improvements planned for later in the year.

7. PARISH COUNCIL FINANCE

The budget for the coming financial year (2012-2013) is £53,000. Owing to a significant under-spend in 2011-2012, we have only requested a precept of £7,000 from Cheshire East Council and this means an additional £5.00 Council Tax for each Band D equivalent property; [see below for explanation of “precept”].

In the year 2011-2012, we had a budget of £55,000 and had requested a precept of £40,000 which cost an additional £28.57 Council Tax per Band D equivalent property. As mentioned above, there has been a significant under-spend during the year. This was not entirely unexpected as it was necessary to make provision for, for example, the potential running costs of the community hall (£20,000+) in the event of it proving not to be self-financing. As the scheme has not yet come to fruition, this has, therefore resulted in the funding not being spent.

How are we going to spend your money?

	£
Clerk's salary	4,500
Admin – printing of newsletter etc.	1,950
Members' expenses	650
Room hire	360
Subscriptions	700
Insurance and audit	1,700
Grass cutting/maintenance of land	3,000
Playground	1,300
Parish Plan – implementation of projects	1,000
Street lighting – electricity/repairs	550
Website	1,000
Projects	7,500
Community hall (potential shortfall in operation and schemes associated with the hall)	29,300
TOTAL (rounded)	<u>53,510</u>

Cheshire East Council has recently announced that it will be paying a grant to the Parish Council in the order of £2,500 and this is to offset the “double taxation” incurred in parished areas. This sum will be added to reserves which will assist the Parish Council to consider funding any projects, as yet unidentified, during the course of the year.

➤ **What is a precept?** A local council receives the majority of its funding from an annual charge, called the **precept**, and this is requested from the Borough Council and then re-charged to local electors through their Council Tax bill.

For the year 2012-2013, the budget for the Parish Council is £53,000 (rounded) plus reserves of £4,000, totalling £57,000; but as it expects to be holding £50,000 in the bank on 1 April 2012, it only needs £7,000 to fund its budget requirements for the forthcoming year. This is then apportioned in accordance with a formula which divides the precept by the number of Band D equivalent properties in the parish, as follows:

Precept £7,000 ÷ 1400 (number of Band D equivalent properties) = £5.00

8. Partnerships

Cheshire East divided the borough into seven areas for the delivery of many services – these are the Local Area Partnerships (LAPs). The parishes of Stapeley and Batherton are part of the Nantwich LAP which is managed by Sharon Angus-Crawshaw a Cheshire East Council Officer. The LAPS have undergone a reconfiguration but continue to be very active. We are represented on the Nantwich LAP and the LAP Manager is always willing to attend our meetings when required.

The LAP is made up of a series of working groups covering, for example, the environment, health, business, tourism, highways, youth, urban and rural transport. Its membership comprises Cheshire Councillors, Officers from Cheshire East Council, the Emergency Services, Charities (the Third Sector) and other service providers as well as interested Parish Councils. The link for the website is - http://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/community_and_living/local_strategic_partnership/local_area_partnerships/nantwich_area_partnership.aspx

9. Communications with Local Residents (Newsletter, Website)

Website: The website which was created and became operational in June 2009 is very active but we recognise that it is not as user-friendly as it could be and we have asked local residents, through the newsletter, to let us know how it can be improved. We will review the comments before a re-design is implemented.

Public Question Time: Members of the public are given an opportunity to ask a question or make a statement during two specific time-slots at each Parish Council meeting.

Public Debates: As noted in item 5 above, public debates have been introduced and we hope that residents will make good use of this opportunity.

Parish Newsletter: The most recent newsletter has just been finalised and it is hoped that it will be distributed at the end of April. We aim to produce a minimum of three newsletters a year and hope to increase this to four.

Annual Report: As noted earlier, this report is one of the tools used to keep the community informed of the Parish Council's aims and activities.

10. Conclusion

I would urge everyone in the parish to become involved in the community. Tell us what you want and we will work with you to try to resolve problems and provide new services, if we can.

Please try to attend our meetings if you have the opportunity. Do not wait for controversial planning applications to appear on the agenda! The most important part of the planning cycle is the work that goes on before a development plan is prepared and we were pleased that during the first phase of the Local Development Framework process, members of the public came to our meeting and told us what they wanted. This has been fed back to Cheshire East Council and we hope that those comments will inform the Cheshire East Local Plan.

Sandy Gwinn-Freemantle
Chairman of the Parish Council

April 2012