



**MINUTES OF MARDEN ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 5TH
APRIL 2022 AT THE CONGREGATIONAL CHAPEL, WEST END, MARDEN
COMMENCING AT 7.30PM**

1. PRESENT

Chairman Cllr Tippen (in the Chair), Vice-Chairman Cllr Turner, Cllrs Adam, Barker, Besant, Boswell, Burton, Gibson and Robertson. Also in attendance were Alison Hooker (Parish Clerk); County Councillor Lottie Parfitt-Reid, Borough Councillor David Burton, Borough Councillor Claudine Russell and Community Warden Mira Martin. 20 members of village organisations & societies and residents were also attendance.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:

Apologies were received from Deputy Clerk, Rachel Gillis-Coates; Hollie Savory (Admin Assistant); PCSO Nicola Morris; Ray Lane (Marden Bowls Club); John Haddow (PPG); Rob Yorke (Marden Youth Club); Anne Woodberry (Marden Library); and Sian Burr (Marden Walking Group).

The Chairman, Cllr Tippen, opened the meeting by welcoming all in attendance and thanked everyone for coming along. Thanks were also expressed to the Congregational Chapel for allowing the use of the venue.

3. MINUTES THE PREVIOUS ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Minutes of meeting held on 13th April 2021 were approved as a correct record and were signed by the Chairman.

4. CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT

Cllr Tippen gave her report on the Parish Council for the last 12 months:

“After 2 long and difficult years it is wonderful to once again be able to hold a face-to-face Annual Parish Meeting. The Parish Council was finally able to meet in person from 11th May 2021. Until recently we have had to hold all our meetings at the Memorial Hall as our Council meeting room is very small and can be very cramped if we have a full complement of Councillors and members of the public present. From this month we will resume using The Allens meeting room for Full Council and Amenities meetings and continue to use the Hall for Planning meetings, as we need access to a projector screen to review planning applications.

We held a virtual Annual Parish Meeting in April last year when we reported on activities in the previous year, and I can report that the Council has been even busier in the last 12 months working on your behalf to achieve the best outcomes we can for Marden.

We responded to the Maidstone Borough Council Local Plan Review Regulation 19 in December 2021. As many of you will be aware the draft Local Plan allocates a further development site of 113 dwellings for Marden at land adjacent to Albion Road and Copper Lane. We raised concerns about this site in our Regulation 18b feedback in December 2020 and whilst some of them have been taken on board in the latest draft we still have reservations; but the matter is now out of our hands and MBC's hands, and we wait to see what the Government Inspector has to say later in the year.

We have continued to liaise with Redrow about the allotment site at Highwood Green. Redrow are determined that we should take on the parking spaces adjacent to the site as well as the allotments. We have made it clear to them that we do not want responsibility for the parking spaces, and we only want the allotment site. The ball continues to bat back and forth, once we achieve an outcome that is satisfactory to the Parish Council, the Allotment Association and the residents of Highwood Green we will let residents know.

We were very pleased that at long last the rather tatty hedge next to the Library has been removed and we have had the path levelled and re paved. Last week Cllr Boswell and I planted up the flower bed and it is now a much more attractive and welcoming space.

We were delighted that we were once again able to hold Marden at Christmas and, judging by the number of people who attended, so were residents. We were less than impressed by the Christmas lights that we had arranged to have erected by a contractor. They were not what we wanted, and we will no longer be dealing with that contractor. We are in the process of sorting out lights for the village that will be much more festive and whilst we can't please all the people all the time we hope we will please the majority.

Highways issues continue to be a cause of concern for residents. I am pleased that the mobile speed indicator device has finally been installed and it is in place at each location for a maximum of 8 weeks. We have also developed a Highways Improvement Plan which currently has 24 outstanding items on it. Kent Highways are supportive, but lack of funding means it is doubtful that many of the identified issues will be resolved in the near future. The Parish Council will continue to push for funding to get some of the key issues dealt with.

We have continued to produce the newsletter 3 times a year and we are grateful to Cllr Anne Boswell who does such an amazing job compiling it and to Deputy Clerk Rachel Gillis-Coates who typesets it and gets it ready for print. Thanks also to Councillors and volunteers who hand deliver to all properties in the village centre and Chainhurst, we post to properties in the rural parts of the parish. I hope you find the newsletter useful - we have received very positive feedback about it. We are also very active on social media and regularly use Facebook to update on events, road closures and many other issues. We know that many people do not use social media and we have introduced a weekly e-newsletter that is delivered via e-mail to recipients on a Friday, this contains all the information we have posted that week on social media. If you haven't signed up to receive it, then please let Deputy Clerk Rachel know.

We have just held our Spring litter pick and thanks go to the 43 adults and 30 children who turned out to do a dirty job, all the normal bottles and cans were found plus some rather more interesting items! I'm sure you'll all agree the parish looks better for the clean-up. I also would like to thank the many residents who regularly litter pick our village roads which helps to keep our village looking beautiful.

Marden will be celebrating Her Majesty the Queen's Platinum Jubilee in style. Along with towns and villages throughout the country we will be lighting our beacon at Southons Field on the evening of Thursday 2nd June. On Saturday 4th June we will be holding a Jubilee Fete at Southons Field, Rachel and Hollie are hard at work organising what will be a wonderful event – I hope you will all join us there to celebrate this momentous occasion.

The world has been shocked and saddened by the recent events in Ukraine. The Parish Council has been pleased to support a collection centre here at the Congregational Chapel for donations and Marden has been truly magnificent. Two very large van loads of vital supplies have already been sent and at least one more will go soon. Thank you, Marden, for however

you have supported people suffering in the most unimaginable way almost on our doorstep here in Europe.

Parish Council elections were held in May 2021 and all who stood for the Parish Council were elected unopposed as less than 11 people stood, we were joined by 1 new councillor, Theresa Gibson. We were 2 councillors short and therefore co-opted new councillors, Matt Burton and Matt Besant in June. All 3 of them bring valuable knowledge and experience to our Parish Council. 3 councillors stood down in May, Maria Brown, Lesley Mannington and Mick Jones and we are very grateful for all the effort they put into their times as councillors, Maria and Lesley clocking up an amazing 43 years' service between them. I am indebted to all the Councillors for their hard work and diligence and for giving up so much of their time for the benefit of Marden.

Finally, a huge thanks to our office staff, without whom we could not function. Deputy Clerk Rachel has truly thrown herself into Parish Council work and her energy and enthusiasm for the role shows itself every day especially in her commitment to communication and all the work that goes into managing the work of the Amenities Committee. Our Clerk steers the ship and it's not been easy over the last 2 years but she has ensured that however we are meeting, be it remotely or face to face, that nothing slips through the gaps. We were delighted to welcome Hollie Savory to the team in September who joins us as Administrative Assistant and has very quickly taken to the many and varied duties of the role. All of us here tonight are grateful to all of you for your hard work, dedication and constant good humour.

We are also extremely grateful to our two caretakers – Ian Jones who looks after the Cemetery so well and who celebrates 35 years with us later this year, and Chris Prince who looks after all our open space and many other jobs that need doing around the village as well.

The Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC) Community Award is given every year to a resident who has gone above and beyond in service to the community. The award, signed by the High Sherriff of Kent and the Chairman of Kent County Council, is traditionally given out at this meeting. As we were unable to hold a face-to-face meeting for the last 2 years the recipients received their awards at a later date. In 2020 the award was given to Robin and Barbara Judd for their many years of service to the village in a variety of capacities. Last year the award was given to Kathy Young who has and remains the mastermind behind the Food Bank, which is providing vital help to those who are very much less fortunate than most of us here.

I am delighted that this year we can physically present the award. The recipient this year is someone who over several years has put in countless hours and a vast amount of effort into keeping Marden blooming. Well known to many of you she founded Marden in Bloom and her energy and enthusiasm has kept it going; the wonderful daffodil displays around the parish have cheered all of us over not only the last few weeks but the last few years as well. Scarecrow safaris, garden safaris, fashion shows, planting and weeding sessions as well as work with the Primary School have all raised the game for nature and biodiversity in Marden. I'm sure you have all guessed that the recipient of this year's award is Anne Boswell."

Unfortunately, Marden Parish Council was not in receipt of the certificate due to issues with obtaining signatures by KALC. Once received it would be presented to Anne at the earliest opportunity.

5. COMMITTEE REPORTS

AMENITIES COMMITTEE REPORT

Cllr Boswell, as Chairman of Amenities Committee, read out the report:

“The Amenities Committee oversees the lovely green spaces in the village - the Playing Field, Napoleon Play Area, Southons Field, as well as the Cemetery and Public Toilets. It is also a discussion forum for Climate, Sustainability & Biodiversity and Health & Wellbeing issues.

Southons Field is a beautiful dog-free haven with a plethora of trees for residents to enjoy and children to run around in a safe and peaceful environment – so important for health and wellbeing. It is where most of the large village events take place. The Parish Council has added six additional picnic benches and another litter bin near the entrance. A bay of swings was installed last Summer - a basket swing, toddler swing and a flat swing - for both children and adults near the Play Trail and this facility has proved a great success.

As part of our sustainability responsibility, the Parish Council held a Tree Charter Day last November when a 'Roots of Remembrance' tree to acknowledge those who have been affected by Covid in the Parish and a Memorial tree for H.M. the Duke of Edinburgh were planted in Southons Field and blessed by The Rev Nicky Harvey. Saplings, which were provided by the Woodland Trust, were also planted on various new developments in the village as well as on the boundary of Southons Field. Thanks were given to Cllr Matt Besant for his help in the event.

The Wildflower Meadow which Marden in Bloom has created is a lovely addition and a bench will be placed next to the meadow by the 'Bloomers'. The Beacon will be lit on the evening of Thursday 2nd June as well as a village fete on Saturday 4th June to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee event.

Opening times: April-August 7am to 8pm, September-October 7am-7pm, November-January 8am-4pm, February & March 8am-6pm (or dusk if earlier).

Marden Playing Field and the children's playgrounds in Napoleon Drive and the Playing Field are popular and well-used, but unfortunately not always in the way we would like. It's important that any anti-social behaviour is reported to 101 in order that our PCSO, Nicola Morris, can follow it up. More CCTV will hopefully be installed shortly to monitor these areas.

As part of our Health & Wellbeing responsibility, six pieces of adult gym equipment have been installed in the Playing Field and we hope residents are utilising this facility. More benches and litter bins have also been placed around the Playing Field for residents to sit and enjoy the open space.

A Dog Bag Station is now in position to help dog walkers pick up their dog waste. We are very grateful to those dog owners who are fastidious about collecting their dog's poo, but unfortunately there are number of dog owners who are irresponsible and spoil the pleasure of the field and surrounding footpaths. Marden Minors Football Club utilise the field to play matches once or twice a month.

Chris Prince, our Caretaker, spends many of his working hours keeping our green spaces in good order. It is unfortunate that some of these hours are spent removing litter and graffiti.

Marden Cemetery is a tranquil place of rest with a plethora of wildlife and is kept immaculate by our long-serving caretaker, Ian Jones. In July Ian will have completed an astonishing 35 years of service and we are very grateful for all his efforts in maintaining the Cemetery to such a high standard. Cllrs Boswell & Tippen also help with a bit of weeding, planting and pruning from time-to-time and Cllr Newton has helped set up a few bird feeders.

Section 4 is now in use but only headstones are permitted in the new burial areas. For ease of maintenance, tended, fencing or the placing of other items on plots are not permitted. A separate area is also being created for the scattering of ashes.

If you are visiting a loved one, please do remember to remove any plastic wrap from flowers and think sustainably about your tributes. We would also like to remind cemetery visitors that when there is a funeral taking place, we would appreciate you visiting another time.

Public Toilets – The Parish is fortunate that the Parish Council is able to maintain this important facility and we are lucky to have a contract with an excellent cleaning company who check them regularly and keep them cleaned to a very high standard.

Parish Council Trees – the Parish Council is very proud of its trees on our open spaces and has a duty of care to protect them. Our Tree Management Policy has recently been updated and strengthened to incorporate sustainability, hedges, zoning, risk assessments etc. Our caretakers observe them monthly, a more detailed survey will be carried out twice a year by the new Tree Warden Charlie Edwards on a voluntary basis and a detailed Tree Audit is undertaken every three years by an external contractor.

The Amenities Committee carries out site visits to all these areas on a regular basis and in between our caretakers keep us posted.

Many thanks to our Clerks, Ground Maintenance staff and Amenities Councillors for their hard work and continuing support.”

PLANNING COMMITTEE REPORT

CLlr Turner, as Chairman of Planning Committee, read out the report:

“At the beginning of 2021, in response to the continuing challenges posed by the Covid pandemic, Planning Committee meetings were online via Zoom. Due to Government legislation not allowing Parish Councils to continue with virtual meetings we had to then start meeting face to face in May 2021, firstly at the John Banks Hall and at their current location in the Old School Room in the Memorial Hall.

One of the main tasks of the Planning Committee this year has been formulating a response to Maidstone Borough Council for the Maidstone Local Plan Review. This has involved widespread discussion and I would like to thank all my colleagues, both on the planning committee and elsewhere, for attending meetings, seminars and formal discussions. This has allowed the Parish Council to formulate, detailed informed and comprehensive responses on behalf of the Parish in regard to this important review process. The sheer volume of information has been quite challenging at times, but I firmly believe your Parish Council has responded as thoroughly and as comprehensively as possible.

In the autumn of 2021, it was agreed that the Marden Neighbourhood Plan should also be reviewed to ensure it continues to be effective. This work has begun, and the Parish will be looking to formulate a steering group to carry out this essential task.

The other major task undertaken by the Planning Committee is reviewing and commenting on planning applications within the Parish. This year 93 planning applications have come before the Council, some of which have been controversial. I hope that all residents' views have been considered - we endeavour to listen to all concerns in formulating a response to the Borough.

As always, I would like to thank my fellow Councillors on the Planning Committee, who bring passion and drive to do the very best for their community. These Councillors bring a vast array of knowledge and skills to all meetings. In particular I would like to thank the Parish Clerk, Alison Hooker. It is not an easy job translating a range of Councillor comments into a coherent and concise format. I know that Ali puts in a huge amount of preparation time, and for this we should all be grateful.”

6. REPORTS
PAROCHIAL CHARITIES
Marden CIO by Kate Tippen

The Marden CIO was formed in June 2019 but it wasn't able to start operating until 2020 when all the finances were in place. The charity is fully funded from the income from the investments made by the benefactors of the original village charities, which have all now been transferred to the CIO. Hence as a charity we do not need to fund raise to support our work.

The objective of the charity is the relief of financial hardship, either generally or individually, of people living in Marden Parish by making grants of money for providing or paying for items, services or facilities.

There are 3 strands to the charity:

Support individuals who are suffering financial hardship by making grants of up to £100 available towards the purchase of specific items

Grant of up to £500 to village organisations to assist with specific projects for the benefit of the people of Marden

Grant of up to £100 towards the support of education and training of the children and young people of Marden.

Working in conjunction with the food bank we have made a number of grants to residents who are suffering severe financial hardship. We have also made several substantial grants to the food bank. Several village organisations have also benefitted from grants.

Full information about the charity can be found at:

<http://www.mardenkent-pc.gov.uk/community/marden-parish-council-13394/marden-cio/>

MARDEN PARISH CHURCH by Revd Nicky Harvey

Revd Harvey stressed the importance of the Food Bank and the Vestry Hall now has a permanent cupboard. She reported that although the Food Bank is only open on Mondays she is happy to help everyone who needs support.

Thanks were expressed to everyone who have donated both financially and with food bags.

Revd Harvey went on to say that the church's fundraising is in aid on restoration to the church bells. This is expected to cost in the region of £80,000 so any support is welcomed.

VILLAGE ORGANISATIONS & GROUPS

All village organisations had been contacted and some had provided a report on their activities since the last APM. These were contained in the handout.

Mira Martin, Community Warden:

At the moment Mira's work is mainly focussed on individuals who have been referred by other agencies. She was still walking around the village, visiting clubs and would be happy to assist if low on helpers.

Chris Barker, Bellringers:

The group of bellringers are flourishing again after the pandemic. Fundraising is required to help restore the bells was the vicar had already raised in her report.

Chris Barker, Marden Village Club:

The Village Club lost revenue and members during the pandemic but are now back to over 1000 members. The full year's entertain has been planned. Mr Barker reported that £1,600 had been fundraised in 2019 and over £6,500 has already been collected for this year. He wished to extend his thanks to the hard work that the committee has been doing.

7. BOROUGH COUNCILLORS REPORT: Cllr David Burton

I can't believe that another year has flown by so quickly. Another year of the challenge of dealing with the COVID pandemic but the reality of living with its ongoing challenges progressively becoming the norm.

The purpose of my speaking to you this evening is to give you an update from MBC. I would like to do this from too slightly different perspectives.

Firstly, there is the very localised work of your three Borough Councillors. There are three of us that represent Marden and Yalding Ward. Annabelle Blackmore and I were joined by the most excellent Claudine Russell following her success in last May's election. Together we work collaboratively on all manner of different, and very local, issues and case work. Be it bringing the MBC enforcement teams to bear in tackling nuisance motor cycles; dealing with planning matters; supporting the Parish Council; helping residents with their housing needs (such as overcrowding and, sadly, even extreme domestic abuse cases that make fleeing victims homeless); presenting the Marden case in Local Plan making; working to get promised delivery of infrastructure such as foot paths and improved healthcare provision; dealing with issues about waste collection as they arise; and dealing with fly tipping, flooding, arranging supplies of sand bags - the list does go on. We do not always have a magic wand to fix everything, but we are all committed to getting the best outcomes that we can possibly achieve.

On the other end of our work, contributing on your behalf to the wider issues of the Borough, there is a lot going on. Madam chairman will throw me out if I make this report a political broadcast – so I will not. But I must report to you that the control of the council changed last May and the team that I am part of took control from the other lot. Upon the change I was then elected as Leader of the Council. Although there are political differences most of the 55 councillors do share one aim. And that is to work for our communities and a better Borough and that is what we have been doing.

The Local Plan Review has, as it always is, been a major challenge. It is essential that MBC has a Local Plan in place because without one we have no control over where development takes place. The housing target is set by National Government. Working with our MPs we are constantly challenging the local housing target. At the end of this year the target for the Borough increases from 833 new homes per year to around 1250. A higher still target we successfully repelled.

This has meant that the plan needs to allocate a further 6000 houses spread over the 15-year period. The plan went through 3 stages of public consultation and the proposal for the development of 2000 houses in Marden was not included. The plan has now been formally submitted for examination by the planning inspectorate, who are like the independent adjudicator, and, if approved, will be adopted early next year.

I have introduced a key policy for MBC for housing. Much of the new housing is simply unaffordable for local people. I have set out an ambition for MBC to acquire 1000 houses from the housing growth and to reserve them at affordable rents for local people. This is possible because the council can obtain the mortgage that many of our young families simply cannot.

Tackling climate change sits at the centre of everything we do. We are determined not to make this a separate agenda of its own but to embed it in every agenda. If we are renewing the waste collection contract, it is about improving recycling rates. If we are tackling congestion, it is about improving air quality. If it is about planning, it must be about open spaces and tree planting and improving biodiversity.

We recently set the budget at Maidstone for the new financial year. Like everyone else, we are challenged by inflation and rising costs, but the new budget reallocates funding to key services like enforcement against fly tipping and planning breaches. It will mean, for the first time in a long while, that the planning department is properly resourced to ensure only the highest standards of delivery, with a new set of policies demanding the best standards of design and eco credentials and protecting our countryside.

We are also setting a new strategy for Maidstone Town Centre. It belongs to us in the rural areas as much as it does to those that live within it. It is our Borough centre. High Streets are changing, and we need to do everything we can to bring in fresh investment, encourage new businesses, restaurants, and shops. We must review how we travel to the town, the parking provision and ease of access. And above all to make it a safe and welcoming town.

We have continued to strengthen our community protection team at Maidstone and work closely with the Police to tackle anti-social behaviour and crime wherever it occurs in both town and rural areas.

I should mention MBC's role regarding the Ukrainian response. MBC sit quite low down in the food chain, but we will have a number of roles. Obviously, the main directions come from central government and KCC take the major role, but MBC is involved in conducting property checks, managing the £350 payments, and generally, with what they refer to as, the wrap around support. I have been on a number of on-line briefings with government ministers, and I can report first hand that there is an enormous amount of work going on to ensure that our guests are going to be properly supported. Everything from DBS checks and all of the safeguarding measures to planning school places, health provision emergency subsistence arrangements. There is a massive operation taking shape behind the scenes that I do not think is widely appreciated yet.

There is much more that I could share with you, but I am sure that you have already heard enough of my voice. More than happy to take questions or do come and chat to me afterwards.

Finally, I would just like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to our parish council. I have dealings with most of the parish councils and I can honestly say that Marden is right up there with the best of the best. They are a pleasure to work with and without expectation each councillor gives generously of their time working on behalf of us all in the parish.

Question:

Raised by a member of the public: What happens to the recycling and rubbish collected in Marden?

The bulk of refuse waste goes through the efficient recycling plant at Aylesford. The recycled waste is hand sorted and every stage is scrutinised. Separation of different waste is undertaken in Maidstone and KCC has overall responsibility on waste management.

8. COUNTY COUNCILLOR REPORT: Cllr Lottie Parfitt-Reid

Cllr Parfitt-Reid had provided a written report which she read out to the meeting:

Ukraine:

Firstly, I want to say how impressed I am with how generous and supportive our community has been and how often the villages wheels galvanise quicker and with greater agility than our authorities! This was also noticeable with the local response to Covid 19.

The current situation is to prioritise providing a secure base which offers warmth and kindness, something which I know many of our residents are extremely keen to do.

It is right, therefore, that our focus at the moment is to ensure those who have been matched as sponsors, are able to offer a place in their home to the Ukrainians who will be joining them.

As I'm sure you can appreciate this is a significant task, but providing that place, in a home, in our community should help our guests feel a sense of normality and safety which they must be craving.

For the Ukrainian children, attending school alongside other children is going to be an important part of helping them to integrate. Those families with school aged children will be helped to find a place in a school as close as possible to their new home. A letter from the Secretary of State for Education was received on Friday (1 April) confirming government expectations that if there are school places available in the local area, even if not in the immediate vicinity of the family's home, the local authority will work with families arriving from Ukraine to enable the children to attend school as soon as possible. The Secretary of State expects that we should also be looking to provide places and, where necessary, use the flexibilities to admit above published admission number (PAN) and exceed the infant class size limit, as well as using the in-year Fair Access Protocol.

At the moment, our efforts are concentrated on finding places for the Ukrainian children in line with these expectations, but it's difficult to gauge the scale until we get a further feel for the numbers of children we need to accommodate and the spread of refugees across the country.

It is very important we give children time to recover from being forced to leave their homes and the need to ensure access to interpreters and other support carers. These considerations are an important part of the arrangements we are putting in place for the families arriving in Kent and every family will be allocated a support worker to help them navigate those difficult early days. This will be funded from the £10,500 per person government grant (excluding education, which is funded separately) that councils receive for 'wrap around support', including language provision.

The leadership team at KCC are very keen to have open discussions regarding ideas for supporting refugees and have actively encouraged all ideas. I was among a group of members who were trying to get County Hall used as a reception centre. However, at this stage the government are keen to stick to the model of Ukrainians only coming here once they are matched, although I wouldn't be surprised if we are overtaken by events and that situation and therefore model changes.

Finally, if anyone is having difficulty accessing information or support, please encourage them to contact me and I shall do my best to assist them. Fortunately, so far I have had no such message in my inbox.

Highways

A significant part of what I do, and have done within the division, is related to highways, the usual potholes, road markings, signage, faulty traffic lights, speeding etc. The hardest part

being the managing of expectations of residents regarding speed limits. Whilst we have the ability to look at sat nav data, which does give a good basic information as to whether a problem exists, it often flies in the face of residents' beliefs, so I have for a number of parishes funded speed surveys for specific roads.

Specific to Marden we had a very positive meeting with Jennie who heads up new schemes, where we looked at extending the double yellow lines around the junction at the top end of the village opposite the farm shop.

We also had a very lengthy discussion around the possibility of putting in double yellow lines along Pattenden Lane, this is something that I personally support and would like to see taken forward. However, it requires a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) to be drawn up and a subsequent consultation, which doesn't come without a cost and is not insignificant, at around £3,000.

The small schemes budget for the whole of Maidstone, for the whole year, is an enormous sum of £30K which has to be spread very thinly over many Parishes. Therefore, funding will need to be found from elsewhere. This is something I am happy to contribute to with my Members Grant, however I'm not in a position to fund all of it.

I have also noticed that Pagehurst Lane has deteriorated significantly and is in need of repair again, I find this staggering for a country lane that was completely resurfaced within the last 2 years. I will be raising this with KCC.

Buses:

I know Marden hasn't been significantly impacted in the proposed cuts in bus subsidies, however the number 5 bus does run alongside the ward and right through my division. The route suffered significant failings at the beginning of the year, whereby disabled residents were left stranded for many hours in Maidstone. Subsequently I called a meeting with ARRIVA and had what I thought was a reasonably positive meeting regarding the quality of service. I haven't had any more complaints.

The route is one of those earmarked for a cut in subsidy, so I would like to encourage everyone to fill in the consultation document.

I can confirm that KCC have had no funding via section 106 to support the service, despite this being a condition of several of Staplehurst's developments. We are in the process of trying to chase up this money, although it does feel like I'm stuck in an endless loop between developer MBC and KCC!

Section 106 Monies

I had a very positive meeting with Richard Kydd, who deals with KCC section 106 and we are just trying to find a convenient time for me to meet with him at County Hall, but as he works from home the vast majority of the time, and when he is in I have had meetings, it means we haven't as yet sat down with the spreadsheet to go through it with a fine toothcomb and to get a real time position everything.

Community schemes I have supported so far:

Local Covid Recovery Grant:

Marden History Group – Replacement of Marden Heritage Centre Equipment - £500

Marden in Bloom - £396

I did also allocate £1,000 to the food bank from the CLRf but the money wasn't applied for, I have tried to contact Nicky, with no luck, to find out what the problem was but I haven't heard back.

It's especially disappointing as I had other organisations who requested money, that I turned away because I had allocated the money to the food bank. I hadn't wanted a situation whereby I promised more money than that was available, I don't think there is anything that can be done at this stage but if the fault was with KCC not picking up the application, I could try and see if we could do as late application.

Member Grant:

Marden Parish Council – £500 towards ground works at the library.

Questions

A question was raised by Cllr Adam stating that walking PROW has been invaluable especially during the pandemic and asked County Cllr Parfitt-Reid if she could provide update could be provided to the Parish Council as to the work that has been undertaken. Cllr Parfitt-Reid would speak to the PROW Officer at KCC and report back.

9. **SPEAKERS**

MARDEN WILDLIFE – Ray Morris

Mr Morris gave a well-informed talk on Marden Wildlife reporting that the group had been set up just prior to lockdown and anyone who has liked the Facebook page is a member. Membership is free of charge. A WhatsApp group has been set up with approximately 50 of the members some of which are well trained and very experienced in different wildlife aspects.

The purpose of the group is enjoyment is paramount as well as the health aspects it offers. Many members take photographs and upload these to Facebook – with such a great support of these a book was recently published and views on future publications is being looked into. Marden is in the Low Weald which is not classed as an area of natural beauty and hardly any records are held by the Kent and Medway Biological Record Centre especially around birds. A business plan was produced in 2015 and one of the main functions of Marden Wildlife is getting the wildlife recorded. Currently working with the Marden Farmer Cluster in biodiversity as well as gathering data for the K&MBRC and sending in sightings of wildlife seen in Marden.

Have undergone a scheme where have helped with ringing of birds. Marden has a lot of Yellow Hammers and Turtle Doves and at least 19 breeding pairs were recorded in Marden last year.

Welcomed the opportunity of working with school aged children through to university age. Mr Morris reported that the highlight of the year was being award the National Award

MARDEN PPG – John Haddow

Unfortunately, John was unable to attend the meeting but had provided a reported to the meeting which was read out by the Chairman.

“Following Ray Morris’s talk with an update on the activities of the Marden Medical Centre Patient Participation Group (PPG) – *in these strange & challenging times* - was never going to be easy. There is a link between the presentations - getting outside into the countryside is good for our health and wellbeing. The PPG is all about helping improve our health and wellbeing. Getting outside into nature and caring about wildlife is good for our physical and mental health. We all need to do it more often – especially in and around our lovely village.

I want to state that we are incredibly lucky to have Marden Medical Centre and its professional, resolute, and caring staff. In tough times – having these GP’s and staff in the village is invaluable. I know you will join me in thanking them for their dedication and support over the years and especially in the last 2 years.

The covid pandemic experience has shown up some gaps or cracks in our NHS, it has also widened economic & health inequalities in the UK. It has however shown us all that front

line NHS staff are dedicated and an essential resource – to be supported. It has also shown that where communities get together – good things can happen. Community and voluntary groups were critical in getting the health message out in the early days of the covid pandemic. Today – we are in the ‘new normal’.

What does this mean for us all?

I want to cover briefly – Who we are, What we do, and Why join the group – if you are not already a PPG member.

Who We Are

Since 2010 the NHS requires every Medical Practice in England to have a PPG – a patient or public consultation group. The purpose is to create an open two-way dialogue between patients, GP’s, and medical staff to help the Practice work as well as it can for both the patients and the professionals. Effectively it ensures that the Practice meets the local patient’s needs and the GPs are held accountable to demonstrate that they try to do this.

The Marden PPG was set up in 2011 – is active, meets at least four times a year and overseen by a committee of fourteen patients (*many practices in the UK and the Weald have dormant or inactive PPG’s*) and is supported by the GP’s and medical staff. Dr Julie Morgan and Mary-Jayne Bournes, the Practice Manager, are actively involved in what we do.

The PPG has around 290 members registered to receive email updates – which is around 4% of the MMC patient list (7200 approx.) – which has been growing for a number of years – as the village grows. If you are not already a member- please join. All Practice patients are welcome to join – but you need to ask to join the group. You will find some application forms available this evening.

What We Do

We form a link between patients and the Practice with a view to making a useful contribution to improving local services. We are the ‘critical friend’ of the Practice. We support the Practice with volunteer help – if needed. We raise general issues that cause patients concerns. We send out regular updates on activities, share Practice news and useful NHS information.

If you are keen to be more involved in the local community, meet people, are interested in improving your health and wellbeing, interested to volunteer or give back and be more aware of issues relating to the Surgery – you should consider joining the group.

Over the last year – The PPG has supported many of the flu and Covid Clinics (20+) – providing car park and waiting room assistance. Thank you to the forty or so members who gave up their time to stand in a yellow vest in the wet and cold. And to Roy Latham who coordinated the volunteers rota.

*A note: The Surgery will **not** be providing Covid Spring Boosters to over 75+ year old patients and other vulnerable eligible groups @ the Surgery – eligible patients should wait to be contacted by the NHS, call 119 or book via the National Booking site – a booster at a nearby vaccination location. Housebound patients will be contacted by the NHS and vaccinated at home. This was a decision made by the Weald Primary Care Network (PCN). This is a similar approach to the first covid-19 vaccinations in 2020/21. The GPs hope to be offering covid boosters @ the Surgery later in the year – the Autumn programme.*

The PPG provided a medicine delivery service for some isolating and vulnerable patients who could not collect their prescriptions from the Surgery.

In conjunction with MPC, the PPG created the Health and Wellbeing Key Contacts list – and distributed (now twice) to all household in the village in the Marden Parish Council Newsletter – *which is a particularly useful, well prepared, and informative document.*

The PPG refreshed the directory of local community groups which is on the PPG website. Members have continued to support local groups (where they could) – the Come & Sing and Living Memories groups – both have a direct health and wellbeing benefit.

PPG members have attended the bi-monthly Weald and Kent Clinical Commissioning Group meetings for patient representatives and shared the activities with the PPG members and sought feedback, as appropriate. Over the last year most of the discussions has been around Covid vaccination plans, lack of access to GP's during the pandemic, the efficacy of remote consultations, and delayed hospital consultations & operations.

Finally, the PPG has helped organise a regular telephone call with various Marden community group leaders – which encourages cooperation, information sharing and partnership in the village. This includes the local primary school, MPC, the Church, the GP's the community warden, the Pharmacy, the Food Bank and Involve (a local social prescribing charity). This has been particularly useful over the past year or so – to share information.

Our next PPG meeting and AGM is 7pm on 23rd June at the Vestry Hall & we will also have a presence at the Platinum Jubilee event on 4th June.

Why Join

The PPG ensures MMC develops services that meet Marden patients needs. Residents can make sure their 'voice is heard' by the doctors. *They do listen.* The PPG also encourages greater health and wellbeing awareness and promotes good health and wellbeing advice.

Some concerning data - Put aside the 6m+ national waiting list for hospital consultations & surgery - in Maidstone - data from 2019, 64% of adults were either over-weight or obese. This is about the national average. Children's obesity is also on the rise – 32% in year 6 in Maidstone. Adult and increasingly children's mental health is also a growing issue – especially post-pandemic. We all need to be more aware of these worsening trends. What can we do about this – locally? This will be a potential initiative for the PPG over the coming months in conjunction with the GPs, Maidstone Borough Council, Kent County Council Public Health, the NHS and various other stakeholders.

Being a PPG member keeps you better informed on health and wellbeing news and programmes. In times of emergency – being a member also means critical information can be better shared quickly with you and with others.

To wrap up - Being healthy is more than just the NHS and GP's – we are all responsible for our own health. Easy access to good GP's and the NHS is a part of the story – where you live, your community support, what you do, how much exercise (*150 minutes per week is the current NHS guideline*), your DNA, all contribute. Living in an attractive, clean & safe environment is also particularly important. *Keep up the excellent work MPC, Marden in Bloom and the community wardens.*

Stay safe, get vaccinated, self-isolate (if you can) when you need to, wear a mask in busy places, wash your hands regularly – but more importantly pay attention to your health and wellbeing.”

10. OTHER ITEMS OF INTEREST**NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN REPORT – Parish Cllr Andy Turner**

As part of the ongoing process of neighbourhood plans Marden Neighbourhood Plan was adopted in February 2020 following several consultations with residents and Maidstone Borough Council. This now forms a legal document and is part of the planning policies within MBC.

Due to the review of the Maidstone Local Plan it was felt by the steering group to review the MNP. This will start with an open day on Saturday 7th May at the Marden Memorial Hall where all are welcome to attend.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT REPORT – Parish Cllr Richard AdamRailway

MPC seeks to act on behalf of users of Marden Railway Station as it is a valuable service for Marden and surrounding areas.

We have had varying degrees of success with meetings with South Eastern and Network Rail and now that things are returning to normality MPC is seeking to arranging meetings with both these organisations about different aspects of the railway.

Not all services have been reintroduced following the pandemic especially the Sunday services and the County Councillor was asked to take back to KCC to lobby Central Government.

The line needs to be back to the service we used to have for people to use for work, education and leisure.

A lot of engineering work is planned so people are advised to check before they travel.

Bus services

Marden's bus services are not currently in the list of services out for consultation for future savings but this will continue to be monitored.

11. QUESTIONS

There were no questions raised from the floor.

There being no further business the Chairman the meeting closed at 9.08pm

Signed:

Date:

Chairman
Marden Parish Council