



**DRAFT MINUTES OF MARDEN ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY
4TH APRIL 2023 AT MARDEN MEMORIAL HALL, GOUDHURST ROAD, 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 and Borough Councillor Claudine Russell. members of village organisations & societies and residents were also attendance.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:

Apologies were received from PCSO Nicola Morris and Borough Cllr David Burton. Representatives of Marden Village Club,

The Chairman, Cllr Tippen, opened the meeting by welcoming all in attendance and thanked everyone for coming along.

3. MINUTES THE PREVIOUS ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Minutes of meeting held on 5th April 2022 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:

“The Parish Council is now back to all its normal meeting venues following the complete lifting of pandemic restrictions. Full Council is held on the second Tuesday of each month and Amenities on the fourth Tuesday at The Allens meeting room. Planning meetings are held on the other two Tuesdays of the month in the Parish Council meeting room. All our meetings are held in public and residents are welcome to attend. If there is a lot of resident interest in an agenda item then a larger room at the Memorial Hall is used. My grateful thanks to my council colleagues for all their hard work on behalf of our community. A Parish Councillor does more than turn up for a couple of hours on a Tuesday evening!

It has been a particularly busy year for your Councillors. We have responded to every planning application submitted within the Parish and any in neighbouring parishes that we are interested in. We have taken an active interest in the emerging Maidstone Local Plan responding where necessary to consultations, alongside this work we are reviewing our own Marden Neighbourhood Plan. We have also responded to many other consultations that come our way, most recently to the KCC Community Services Consultation which proposed the closure of Marden Children's Centre. Your Parish Council spent a long time reviewing this important consultation and unanimously agreed that we strongly opposed this proposal, sending a vigorous response to KCC. We are grateful to the support we have received on this matter from Borough Councillor Claudine Russell and County Councillor Lottie Parfitt-Reid.

We have continued to liaise with Redrow about the allotment site at Highwood Green. The saga continues but there may be some dim light in the tunnel now as Redrow have at long last accepted our position and are prepared to transfer the allotment site only to us. However, I have to report that the Redrow wheels continue to turn slowly and sometimes it feels like they are in reverse. We will persevere and maybe there will be better news next year.

Flooding continues to be a problem after heavy rain. You will all remember the extremely heavy rain we experienced in November, which seemed to go on for most of the month. This caused two notable problems and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. The first was flooded and impassable roads. The good news is that KCC have provided us with flood warning signs that we can put out on road junctions where we know the road has flooded. I am indebted to the flood wardens who keep in regular contact when we are at risk of flooding and put out the signs when needed. We use social media to warn people of flooding and encourage people to find alternative routes.

The second problem is sewer flooding which occurs mainly on the path from Goudhurst Road to Maynards and in Roughlands Lane. Between the beginning of November and the beginning of January I contacted Southern Water no less than 8 times about sewer flooding. I called a meeting with Southern Water in early December to understand the cause of the sewer flooding and what remediation is planned. It was a positive meeting, which I have reported in the recent Parish Council newsletter. The main problem is that much of Marden's surface water especially from the older properties runs off into the foul sewer, which it shouldn't do, thus causing an overload at the pumping stations in periods of heavy rain. Southern Water assured us that they are very aware of the problem and that their engineers are looking at the best ways to mitigate. This all comes down to money and the hope is that Marden will feature in their 2025 strategic plan. In the meantime, those of us who are flood wardens will continue to monitor the situation and report all incidences to Southern Water.

The river and ditch drainage system around the parish is complex. The main rivers – the Teise and the Beult are under the management of the Environment Agency but all the streams and ditches that make up the drainage network are looked after by the Upper Medway Internal Drainage Board. We had a useful meeting with them as we are particularly concerned about the road flooding in Plain Road and Hunton Road at the Mill. Their main message is that climate change is alive and well and excessive rainfall and subsequent flooding is now the norm and not the exception. They are looking at plans for natural flood management and wet woodlands to try and contain water higher upstream, but all these are long term ideas and could take many years to come to fruition.

Over the last year the Parish Council has been pleased to hold a number of public events. Marden at Christmas was as successful and popular as ever. Our Jubilee celebrations were very well attended and a great way of bringing the community together. Little did we know that only 3 months later we would be mourning Her Majesty the Queen. The Parish Council liaised very closely with Rev Nicky to ensure that Marden fully respected all the protocols during the mourning period. We now look forward to the King's Coronation and plans are well underway for Marden's own celebration, our Coronation Fete, on Monday 8th May at Southons Field. I hope to see you all there.

Highways issues continue to be a cause of concern for residents. We have developed a Highways Improvement Plan which currently has 23 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.

The Parish Council also has an Infrastructure Spend Plan, which identifies all the improvements we would like to see in the village. Some of the small items the Parish Council will be able to fund, but large, more ambitious plans such as a new pavilion at Southons Field are longer term and will require a greater level of funding.

We are committed to maintaining regular communication with residents through a number of different channels. 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. 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 email 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 also have a network of notice boards which are updated weekly.

We have just held our Spring litter pick and thanks go to all the people who turned out to do a dirty job. I'm sure you'll all agree the parish looks better for it although we weren't to know that 2 days later on bin collection day there would be high winds sending bins and rubbish flying.

We held a successful Summer Play Scheme in July at Marden Primary Academy. Jordan Manley, who has managed the scheme for a number of years, is unable to carry on due to her work commitments, but I am delighted that we have been able to recruit a new Play Scheme Manager for this Summer. Many of you will know Jen Ward, was Hindley, who grew up in Marden and has been teaching at Marden Primary Academy. We can now look forward to another successful Summer Play Scheme this year.

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. Ali our Clerk and font of all Marden knowledge steers the ship and it's not easy with 11 Councillors to contain, but she makes sure that we do what we have to and nothing slips through the gaps. Last September Ali achieved the incredible milestone of 20 years' service to the Parish Council. We were sorry that Hollie Savory, our Administrative Assistant, left us in March to return to the industry she had previously worked in. She is much missed but we wish her all success in her new role. We are now recruiting for a replacement. All of us here tonight are grateful to Ali and Rachel 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 celebrated 35 years with us last July, and Chris Prince who looks after all our open space and many other jobs that need doing around the village as well.

KALC Community Award will be announced on the night.”

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, Rookery Path and Southons Field, as well as Marden Cemetery and Public Toilets. It is also a discussion forum for Climate, Sustainability & Biodiversity as well as Health & Wellbeing issues.

Southons Field

This 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. As well as the Play Trail - which presents a challenge for both adults and children - there's a bay of swings, football nets and several picnic benches. Two more benches will be added this year – one for children and one with wheelchair access. Marden Wildlife has installed two QR information codes explaining the wildlife, trees, wildflower meadow etc. which residents may find of interest. There are various memorial trees in the field including a 'Roots of Remembrance' tree to acknowledge those who were affected by Covid in the Parish and a Memorial tree for H.M. the Duke of Edinburgh. In the Spring, an oak tree, which was kindly donated by Golden Hill Nursery, was planted as a Memorial to HM Queen Elizabeth II close to the Duke of Edinburgh's – hopefully their roots will become entwined! The Wildflower Meadow which Marden in Bloom created looks wonderful in early Summer attracting many bees and butterflies and a bench has been placed next to the meadow by the 'Bloomers'. The gates leading to the field will need replacing soon and Councillors are investigating suitable options.

The field also hosts the Village Beacon and is where most of the large village events take place. This year the King's Coronation Fete will be held on Monday 8th May, the Marden Motor Club Show on 27th May, the Rude Mechanicals Theatre Company will perform on 23rd June and the Hazlitt Theatre will hopefully be putting on a family show on the 15th August.

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 Rookery Path

The children's playgrounds in Napoleon Drive and the Playing Field are popular and well-used. As well as the play equipment, there's an adult gym, sports wall, youth shelter and Dog Bag Station. Unfortunately, the picnic bench in Napoleon Drive has been damaged and reported as a crime and will be replaced with a new piece of equipment at some point. More CCTV will be installed shortly to monitor these areas.

Marden Minors Football Club no longer require the use of the field for football matches, so the old Changing Rooms are now redundant. Marden Parish Council still has S106 monies left to spend at the Playing Field which cannot legally be spent elsewhere. We are currently undertaking a public consultation and are proposing refurbishment of the existing building with a small extension. The options that residents can vote on are: use as a dedicated youth provision with controlled supervision; demolish the existing building and replace with a small building for storage; or any other suggestions from residents. We are conscious that Marden does not have a dedicated youth facility and the continual expansion of the community means this has become increasingly important.

Chris Prince, our Caretaker, together with our contractors, spend many hours keeping our green spaces in good order. It is unfortunate that some of these hours are spent removing litter and graffiti.

Marden Cemetery

This is a tranquil place of rest with a plethora of wildlife and is kept immaculate by our caretaker Ian Jones (who completed 35 years' service with the Parish Council in 2022) and we are very grateful for all his efforts in maintaining the Cemetery to such a high standard. 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. We are in the process of creating a small area for the scattering of ashes and are trialling wildflowers

here. A sign is being installed at the beginning of the permissive path in Maidstone Road by the bend leading to the cemetery.

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.

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. We have a robust and sustainable Tree Management Policy, and our caretakers check them on a monthly basis, a more detailed survey is carried out twice a year by the Tree Warden Charlie Edwards on a voluntary basis and a detailed Tree Audit is undertaken every three years by an external contractor.

As part of the Parish Council's biodiversity responsibilities and the Queen's Green Canopy campaign, we recently planted several trees at the Playing Field to help create a wildlife corridor and many whips/saplings were also planted in March. Sadly, the saplings planted in Autumn 2021 on several new developments have either died or been destroyed.

Public Toilets

The Parish is fortunate that the Parish Council can 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. Councillors have been exploring ways of installing a water refill station and have decided the easiest solution is to install drinking taps in both the ladies and gents' toilets for people to refill their water bottles.

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

Environmental Sub-Group

The Parish Council has now set up an Environmental Sub-Group and has been drafting an Estate Management Plan looking at realistic and manageable ways in which the Parish Council operates such as recycling, energy, purchasing and will be formulating a more sustainable mowing strategy e.g. 'No Mow May'. We have also been investigating a Carbon Emissions Calculator to find out Marden's carbon footprint which shows the Parish's footprint is not only above the Borough of Maidstone's which is higher than the UK average!

Health & Wellbeing

Marden Parish Council strive to provide as much information as possible on health and wellbeing and in liaison with the PPG, maintain a 'Health & Wellbeing Contact List' which is updated on a regular basis. We are part of the Marden Community Engagement Group which is a very useful collaborative liaison group who link up and share information to try and tie up missing links. Members include Marden Medical Centre, the PPG, the Children's Centre, the Parish Church, Involve (Social Prescribing), the School, Village Community Warden, etc.

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

PLANNING COMMITTEE REPORT

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

“2022/23 saw business as usual for the Marden Parish Council's Planning Committee.

Face to face meetings being held in the Parish office twice monthly and occasionally in the Old School Room for some of our larger applications or where large numbers of the public wished to attend.

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 regarding 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. This year will see the start of the Stage 2 Public hearings that are conducted by the Planning Inspector. Currently site allocation for Marden will be discussed on Thursday 18th May in person in the Town Hall.

The Marden Neighbourhood Plan review is still on going with members of the Parish reviewing and cross referencing any changes to the MBC's emerging Local Plan and changes to the National Planning Policy Framework to see if the MNHP policies are still current and still in conformity with these two documents.

This work is being carried out in line with MBC Local Plan review. In May 2022 we held our first open day to kick start our MNHP review. Asking the Village about the Vision of Marden. It was fairly well attended and the Steering Group got some good feedback and suggestions. This work is ongoing and soon we will be asking for members of the community to come forward and help volunteer on delivering this vital document for the whole parish.

The other major task undertaken by the Planning Committee is reviewing and commenting on planning applications within the Parish. This year 115 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

MARDEN PARISH CHURCH by Revd Nicky Harvey

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.

7. BOROUGH COUNCILLORS REPORT: Cllr Claudine Russell

8. **COUNTY COUNCILLOR REPORT: Cllr Lottie Parfitt-Reid**
Cllr Parfitt-Reid had provided a written report which she read out to the meeting:

9. **SPEAKERS**

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

PUBLIC TRANSPORT REPORT – Parish Cllr Richard Adam

Railway

Bus services

11. **QUESTIONS**

There were no questions raised from the floor.

There being no further business the Chairman the meeting closed at

Signed:

Date:

Chairman
Marden Parish Council