

# **AMENITIES COMMITTEE REPORT**

**By Cllr Anne Boswell, Chairman of Amenities**

The Amenities Committee oversees the lovely green spaces in the village - the Playing Field, Napoleon Drive Play Area, Rookery Path and Southons Field, as well as Marden Cemetery and Public Toilets. Both the Environmental Sub-Group and the Village Events Sub-Committee also report to Amenities.

## **Southons Field**

This is a lovely dog-free haven with many specimen trees for residents to enjoy and children can run around in a safe and peaceful environment. As well as the Play Trail there's a bay of swings and picnic benches which are inspected weekly by the caretaker. It's great to see so many children and adults using the football goal and the Rugby Taggers run a couple of sessions on the field on a Saturday morning. When funds permit, we are hoping to install another piece of equipment.

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 memorial trees for HM the Duke of Edinburgh and HM Queen Elizabeth II. A Wild Service/Chequer tree will be planted to commemorate HM King Charles III. The Wildflower Meadow, which Marden in Bloom created, has been overtaken by grass, but some work will be undertaken to remove some of the grass and replace with seeds.

The field also hosts the Village Beacon and is where most of the large village events take place. This year the Beacon will be lit on Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> May to commemorate VE Day 80, the Marden Motor Club Show on 24<sup>th</sup> May and the Rude Mechanicals Theatre Company will perform again on 27<sup>th</sup> June.

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 and youth shelter which are inspected weekly by the caretaker and a Dog Bag Station.

A new spinner has been installed which is proving popular along with a parish notice board as there's a lot of footfall in the field. More CCTV will be installed shortly to monitor these areas.

At the request of a resident, two fixed football goals will be in place shortly for those keen footballers to sharpen up and practice their football skills. At some point, there may be a junior football team playing in the field and we are trying to arrange for some training sessions in the summer by Charlton or Maidstone football club/s. As the Chairman has already mentioned, after public consultation, we are hoping the old changing rooms will be refurbished and used as a small community space with storage areas, a WC facility, small community room and kitchenette area. The planning application has been submitted to Maidstone Borough Council and will be

mainly funded with S106 monies left to spend at the Playing Field which cannot legally be spent elsewhere.

Our caretakers spend many hours keeping our green spaces in good order, and it is unfortunate that some of these hours are spent removing litter and graffiti.

### **Marden Cemetery**

The cemetery is a tranquil place of rest with a plethora of wildlife. As already mentioned, our long-serving and dedicated caretaker Ian Jones has now retired – Ian looked after the cemetery so well and kept it looking beautiful. We will be employing a new caretaker shortly.

In the new Section 4 only headstones are permitted in the burial areas. For ease of maintenance, tended, fencing or the placing of other items on plots are not permitted. There is a small area for the scattering of ashes under a tree where wildflower seeds have been planted and a memorial stone placed. A sign has been 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 wrapping 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 as well as a new Hedgerow Policy, and our caretakers check them on a monthly basis and after high winds. 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 environmental responsibility, last year we planted 1,000 whips to form a hedgerow in the field behind the Cemetery which Marden Parish Council owns, and we hope to extend the hedgerow next winter. Another 1,000 whips were planted to create a new mini woodland for Marden with the potential in the future for woodland burials as part of an expansion to the Cemetery. Fortunately, most of the saplings have survived.

### **Public Toilets**

Whilst the building is owned by Maidstone Borough Council, 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 checks them regularly and keeps them cleaned to a very high standard. We have obtained grants to install solar panels on the roof of the building and are also exploring installing a water fountain at the front of the building.

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 now has a statutory duty to exercise all its functions regarding the purpose of conserving biodiversity and this includes raising public awareness of biodiversity issues in the community.

The Environmental Sub-Group endeavours to provide information on sustainable initiatives and has created an Estate Management Plan which looks at realistic and manageable ways in which the Parish Council operates such as recycling, energy, purchasing and has agreed a sustainable Maintenance Strategy for its open spaces. We also have an Environmental and Biodiversity Policy. The group has been extended to any residents and businesses who are interested in helping with the project. Some of the Councillors have attained Carbon Literacy status and exploring other initiatives such as achieving Earth Charter status, running a Retrofit session for residents and looking at EV chargers being installed. There is now a Plastic Free Marden Campaign where 15 community allies, 3 businesses and the Parish Council sign up to pledging to eliminate three single-use plastic items from their operations. At the recent Village Litter pick they undertook a plastic audit and some of the items will be made into a sculpture.

### **Health & Wellbeing**

Marden Parish Council strives to provide as much information as possible on health and wellbeing particularly in the parish newsletter. 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 Parish Church, Involve (Social Prescribing), the Marden Dementia Community group, the Primary Academy etc.

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