



**DRAFT MINUTES OF MARDEN ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD
ON TUESDAY 8TH APRIL 2025 AT MARDEN MEMORIAL HALL,
GOUDHURST ROAD, MARDEN COMMENCING AT 7.30PM**

1. PRESENT

Cllrs Adam, Boswell, Gibson, Newton, Rabot, Summersgill (also as a Borough Cllr), Tippen (in the Chair) and Turner. The Clerk, Deputy Clerk, PCs Chad Maskell and George Head, Borough Cllr Couch, Speakers: Sue Eltringham and Ben Thompson and members of the public were also in attendance.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:

Apologies were received from Cllrs Dobinson and Goda, County Cllr Parfitt, Marden Bowls Club, Ray Morris/Lou Carpenter of Marden Wildlife and Martin Goodman of Marden Sports 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 2nd April 2024 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:

All of us Parish Councillors, and our Clerks, would agree that our work for the Parish Council is often frustrating, dependent on others and can take a long time to achieve even the smallest benefit for the community. However, to start on a positive note I was beyond proud to receive the Quality Gold Award from the National Association of Local Councils on behalf of Marden Parish Council last November. The Gold Award is the highest award of the Local Council Award Scheme and Marden is one of the very few Parish and Town Councils in Kent to be awarded the accreditation. The award recognises that the Council achieves good practice in governance, community engagement and council improvement. We are not resting on our laurels and will continue to strive to improve our offer to the community doing as much as we can to deliver services whilst continuing to be efficient and cost effective.

The allotment saga at Highwood Green continues. As I said this time last year and the year before the Redrow wheels continue to turn slowly and sometimes it feels like they are in reverse. Again, as I said last year and the year before we will persevere and maybe there will be better news later this year!

Highway issues continue to be a cause for concern for us and our residents. We have a Highways Improvement Plan, which finally is starting to see some benefits. We have long been concerned about pedestrian safety at the top of

Pattenden Lane where the very wide road mouth meant that pedestrians were often taking their life in their hands when crossing the road. Kent Highways produced a carefully measured plan to widen the pavement and put in much needed dropped kerbs all of which have been installed since January. We asked Highways to widen the pavement on the shops side of the junction, as well as the other side, but they said this was not possible as it would restrict the width of the junction too much. I am sure those of you who use this crossing will agree that it is now much easier. It is of course not helped by those motorists who feel it is ok for them to flout highway regulations and routinely park on double yellow lines, they clearly do not appreciate or care about the danger their selfish actions have on pedestrians and other motorists. Other highway improvements that are now in progress include the continuation of single yellow lines along Goudhurst Road, which should help to reduce all day parking and provide more space for parents to park at School drop off and pick up. Double yellow lines in Albion Road around the junctions of Seymour Drive and Stanley Road are also in the pipeline. We will shortly be deciding on or next five highway improvements to put to KCC Highways for implementation. I am grateful to those residents who attended our open morning on 22nd March and gave us their input.

As residents will be aware the Primary Academy has submitted an application for a significant extension to accommodate 2 form entry. The Parish Council was supportive of the application but has serious concerns about highway safety at drop off and pick up times. As yet we have not heard if the application has been approved.

The finger post at the Thorn Road/Plain Road junction, which was demolished in December 2022, has been a source of immense frustration to us. Having secured a contractor to remove the post and a contractor to repair it we were then advised at the 11th hour by Kent Highways that we are not permitted to reinstall a cast iron signpost on safety grounds. We see the signpost as an important heritage asset which must be preserved, we will continue to seek a solution to this issue.

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 have developed plans to redevelop the old changing rooms at the Playing Field into a community facility and the planning application has recently been submitted to Maidstone Borough Council. Much of the funding for this project will come from S106 money from the Highwood Green, Windsor Meadow and Parsonage developments. If further funding is needed to complete this project then we will seek grants from outside bodies and will not be taking money from the Council Tax precept.

Flooding has continued to be high on our agenda. We were pleased that Southern Water has invested over £800,000 to improve the sewer network in the village. However, the heavy rain at the beginning of January resulted in the Maynards Sewer overflowing yet again, despite the extensive work

undertaken by Southern Water, we are still awaiting an explanation from them as to why this happened.

At times Marden feels very isolated and unsupported especially by Kent County Council. Their budgetary problems are well publicised but for our community it means we no longer have a community warden, a Children's Centre or any youth support services. Police reorganisation also means we no longer have a PCSO. The vulnerable members of our community therefore have to rely on other services such as the excellent voluntary work undertaken by the Food Bank and puts more pressure on our already overstretched Medical Centre. Yes, we could have access to a Community Warden if the Parish Council was prepared to pay for it and the same for a youth worker but with an already overstretched budget this is not something we can contemplate. If you lived in the town you would have access to these services, without any additional cost.

We have two Community Police officers who we share with the rest of the Marden, Yalding, Collier Street, Hunton and Nettlestead Ward, all of Staplehurst Ward and all of Headcorn Ward. From west to east their patch is at least 16 miles, along country lanes so it's not surprising we see little of them. Having said that we have a good relationship with our PCs and they are committed to do what they can to support Marden. We recently held a Police surgery at the Village Club which a number of residents attended and raised concerns which will be taken forward. We plan to hold further surgeries with the Police.

During the past year we have held a number of community events including the beacon lighting last June to commemorate 80 years since D-Day, the Children's Summer Play Scheme and Marden at Christmas. All were well attended and much enjoyed. We hope that many of you will join us on 8th May this year for a beacon lighting to commemorate 80 years since VE Day. The Summer Play Scheme will run for 8 days from 23rd July to 1st August, once more run by Jen Ward and her team, plans are well underway. Marden at Christmas will of course take place on 6th December, Father Christmas will be in his grotto with his elves as usual.

Our annual litter pick took place on Saturday 29th March. More than 60 residents were joined by 15 Police Cadets who collected over 200 bags of rubbish from within the village itself and from the surrounding lanes. A huge thank you to everyone who took part and to those who regularly litter pick around the parish. It's a shame we have to do it but reassuring that we have so many committed members of our community who are prepared to give up their time to do a dirty job.

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 Weeks 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 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 also have a network of notice boards which are updated weekly.

Thanks to all my council colleagues for all the hard work and long hours they have put in over the year. During the last year Councillor Matt Besant stood down as he has left the area – we are very grateful to him for the work he did for the Parish during his time in office. We co-opted 2 new councillors, Paul Dobinson and Jon Goda, both of whom have hit the ground running and are making valuable contributions to the Council. We still have one vacancy for a Parish Councillor, if you want to make a positive contribution to your community please come and talk to any of us after the meeting. This will be my last report to you as Chairman of the Council. Our terms of reference state that Chairman should be in post for no more than three years, and I have done four years. Council will vote for a new Chairman in May.

Finally, a huge thanks to our staff, without whom we could not function. Deputy Clerk Rachel throws 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 (when we are at full complement) Councillors to contain, but she makes sure that we do what we have to and nothing slips through the gaps. Lisa Stevens is our Administrative Assistant, who supports all aspects of our office work. All of us here tonight are grateful to Ali, Rachel and Lisa for your hard work, dedication and constant good humour.

Ian Jones, our Cemetery Caretaker, retired on 31st March after 38 years looking after the Cemetery. He will be much missed. We are now recruiting for a new Parish Groundsperson.

We are very grateful to Chris Prince, our Village Caretaker, who looks after all our open space and many other jobs that need doing around the village as well.

The Chairman then presented the KALC Community Award:

Each year we recognise a member of our community who has gone above and beyond in the community and present them with the Kent Association of Local Councils Community Award.

This year the Parish Council has chosen a resident who has worked tirelessly with our older residents, some of whom suffer with dementia, to bring alive

their sporting memories through regular sessions at the Sports Club along with outings, talks and many other activities.

I'm delighted to present this year's award to Sue Eltringham, founder and organiser of Sporting Memories.

5. COMMITTEE REPORTS
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 8th May to commemorate VE Day 80, the Marden Motor Club Show on 24th May and the Rude Mechanicals Theatre Company will perform again on 27th 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 foot fall 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 Community Football Trust.

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.

FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT

By Cllr Andy Turner, Chairman of Finance

Marden Parish Council Finance Committee meets at least four times a year to discuss the financial aspects of the council.

The Clerk, acting as Responsible Financial Officer (RFO), reports to the Committee on the income and expenditure incurred each quarter and the Committee discuss this along with comparing to the budget set the previous year.

On 29th October 2024 the Finance Committee met to receive the RFO's report to Councillors providing the income and expenditure forecast to 31st March 2025 along with a draft budget for the forthcoming financial year. Councillors reviewed this along with any requests for additional expenditure, revenue and/or capital, and started to prepare the document ready for agreement in January when setting the precept and finalising the budget for 2025/26.

The precept is an amount set by Parish Councils which is added to the annual council tax bill and collected by Maidstone Borough Council on behalf of Marden PC.

The Parish Council makes every effort to maintain the existing level of service as well as staying on a sustainable financial footing. We always strive to be prudent and diligent with our finances. Councillors have once again undertaken a thorough review but due to inflation and increase in employer's National Insurance contributions, a need to start rebuilding the council's reserves to a more sustainable level and a general percentage increase in the cost of various services, the Parish Council has had to make the difficult decision to make an increase in the amount of money collected from residents to be spent in Marden in the next financial year from April 2025 for a Band D taxpayer will be £99.45 per annum or £8.29 per month. This is an increase of £16.73 per year or £1.40 per month for a Band D property. We understand how difficult it is for residents in the current financial crisis and hope you understand our decision to make the slight increase.

Other forms of income include play scheme fees, cemetery fees, external grants and parish services grant. The Parish Services Grant is set and paid to us by Maidstone Borough Council for services that are received by residents living within the urban area of Maidstone Borough who are not charged an additional Precept payment. In Marden PC's case this is for maintenance of open spaces.

The Parish Council accounts are audited twice a year by an Internal Auditor who is independent from the Council and an external audit undertaken at the end of the financial year by an auditor agreed by Smaller Authorities' Audit Appointments (SAAA). All financial information is available on the Parish Council website.

Thanks are expressed to Alison and all Cllrs on the Finance Committee.

PLANNING COMMITTEE REPORT

By Cllr Andy Turner, Chairman of Planning

2024/25 saw business as usual for the Marden Parish Council's Planning Committee.

Meetings continue to be 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.

The Planning Committee this year has been, as ever, reviewing and commenting on planning applications that have come forward within the parish. The scope of application varies greatly from small scale domestic extensions/loft conversions to strategic houses sites to large scale infrastructure projects like solar farms and everything in-between! This has involved keeping on top of all the policy requirements both locally and nationally, and all the changes that have occurred alongside. Biodiversity and habitat have featured heavily in these changes with Bio-diversity Net Gain (BNG) being the big one! I would like to thank all my colleagues, both on the Planning Committee and our Borough Councillors for keep the MPC abreast of all these changes and developments.

Alongside, this the Planning Committee has been involved in liaising and working with MBC on the Marden Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan (CAAMP). This has involved the Planning Committee and MPC working with MBC's conservation officers to re-assess and carry out an appraisal on the conservation area(s) within the Parish of Marden. This included carrying a public consultation on the appraisal. The information has been collated, and MBC has issued the final edition of the CAAMP which has shown no changes to the current document.

The Marden Neighbourhood Plan (MNP) review is still on going. Last month an open morning was held and part of this was to showcase the policy changes (under Regulation 14). Details can be viewed at the rear of the hall and the consultation is open until 25th April. If you require further details please speak to any Cllr or contact Ali in the parish office. Following the closing date the responses will be reviewed and any amendments made before re-submission to MBC for Comment.

The other major task undertaken by the Planning Committee is reviewing and commenting on planning applications within the Parish. This year 108 planning applications have come before the Council, which is slightly more than last year, some of which have been controversial. I hope that all residents' views have been considered and 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

Several village organisations and groups had provided either a report for the handout or gave a verbal report on the night.

Darren Nicholls, Marden Wildlife

Darren gave an update on the report provided by Ray Morris which is in the handout.

Richard Adam, Marden History Group

Richard gave an update following on from the report in the handout:

Next talk at Marden Village Club on 22nd April – WWII Aviation by Philip Day.

A volunteers session is being held on 15th April in the Library for anyone interested.

7. BOROUGH COUNCILLORS REPORT: Cllr Mike Summersgill

The full report was available in the handout but Cllr Summersgill gave a brief resume of MBC's activities.

8. COUNTY COUNCILLOR REPORT: Cllr Lottie Parfitt-Reid

Unfortunately, County Cllr Parfitt was unable to attend or submit a report in time for the meeting.

9. SPEAKERS:

Sue Eltringham, Sporting Memories

Sue spoke about what was involved in the Sporting Memories group and welcomed anyone to go along and enjoy the activities. Brings people together to combat loneliness. Group has been running for nearly 3 years and were successful initially to obtain funding and able to use the venue at Marden Sports Club.

Ben Thompson, Natural England

Attended, along with Peter Hall, the House of Lords to speak about Marden farming. Aim is to recover nature not just conserving – and are evidence led. Working with Marden Wildlife and Farming Cluster.

Working with farmers along the Rivers Beult and Lesser Teise regarding contamination.

Spoke about Turtle Doves and Marden is very much the core site for these migrating back from Africa. Funding GPS tags for Turtle Doves which Marden Wildlife will be fitting these when they migrate back to Marden.

Marden Meadow SSSI with Green Winged Orchids in May and working to expand the area out.

River Beult is the only protected river in Kent – best example of a clay river and a condition assessment was undertaken last year (previously done in 2014) – the results of which are due to be published shortly.

Peter Hall – Marden Farming cluster

10k acres of continuous land around the parish – including the River Beult and Lesser Tiese (30 farmers).

One in the original intentions of DEFRA was that the environmental land management was to deliver landscape scale improvement – farmers working together: www.mardenfarmercluster.org

Relationship with Natural England working on the farming cluster and Marden is one of the best examples in the country. Gives Marden Wildlife access to a large area especially in regard to natural hedgerows.

Moving forward to creating a community asset working with Marden Medical Centre/Nature Prescribing and the regular organised walks around the parish.

10. OTHER ITEMS OF INTEREST

Neighbourhood Plan Report – Parish Cllr Andy Turner

Covered in the Planning Committee report.

Public Transport Report – Parish Cllr Richard Adam

Trains

Train timetable service pattern has changed but same level of service although reliability hasn't improved. Fares went up beyond inflation Meeting still trying to be arranged with South Eastern and Network Rail.

Buses

Nationally the DfT fare cap scheme is ongoing – now being £3 unfortunately Marden's local bus service is not part of the scheme.

11. QUESTIONS

Lift at Marden Station – Any progress? Round of funding every few years. Marden has got through to the next stage but waiting for a technical assessment.

Thanks were given to the work undertaken by the Parish Council.

There being no further business the Chairman the meeting closed at 8.56pm

Signed:

Date:

Chairman
Marden Parish Council