



**DRAFT MINUTES OF MARDEN ANNUAL RESIDENTS' MEETING
HELD ON TUESDAY 14TH APRIL 2026 IN THE OLD SCHOOL ROOM,
MARDEN MEMORIAL HALL, GOUDHURST ROAD, MARDEN
COMMENCING AT 7.30PM**

1. PRESENT

Cllr Rabot (in the Chair), the Parish Clerk, 6 Parish Cllrs, Borough Cllrs Couch and Russell, Revd Nicky Harvey and 7 Members of the public were in attendance.

County Cllr Black arrived towards the end of the meeting.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:

Apologies were received from Cllrs Boswell, Gibson, Goda and Summersgill.

The Chairman, Cllr Rabot, 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 8th April 2025 were approved as a correct record and were signed by the Chairman.

4. CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT

Cllr Rabot gave his report on the Parish Council for the last 12 months:

Welcome to the Marden Annual Residents' Meeting, which gives us an opportunity to explain to you our work on your behalf in Marden and for you to give us feedback. I would firstly like to acknowledge the hard work of Alison Hooker our Parish Clerk for leading the Council staff in our work and maintaining such good relations with our partner agencies and for her dedication to serving the community especially when facing issues of local concern. I also am very grateful for the hard work Marden Parish Councillors put in to make sure we can serve the community with a range of expertise and skills on environmental, planning and transport issues that are of local concern.

This year has seen the Parish Council being presented with a number of challenges such as the issues with South East Water outages, an Environmental Scoping Assessment for Land to the North of Marden, the coming Local Government Re-organisation and issues relating to our roads and railways.

We now have a new sub-group looking at highways issues such as extending double yellow lines to The Wickets from Stanley Road, request KCC for warning signs at the bend at West End and investigate the possibility of business sponsorship for Village Gateway signs.

Our new caretaker, Neil Watkins has made an impressive start this year in ensuring the cemetery is maintained to a high standard and is a contributor so positively to the landscape of Marden. On the 24th of January approximately 10 enthusiastic volunteers from Marden in Bloom and 12 Police Cadets planted 1000 local native hedging stock at the back of the Cemetery to enclose the area where the Cemetery will be extended.

Rachel Weeks, our Deputy Clerk has been working hard on updating the Parish Council's website and we will soon have a much more accessible website to offer residents. She also continues to work on how we communicate with residents on social media and send out updates on the Weekly Bulletin. We now have 350 followers on Facebook, 118 followers on X, 518 followers on Instagram and 461 subscribers for the E- Newsletter. Cllr Anne Boswell's consistent efforts throughout the year to put together the quarterly newsletter is also much appreciated as the only sure way to communicate to all Marden residents. Anne also has been very supportive as the Vice-Chair of the Parish Council and very energetic in championing environmental issues.

As was acknowledged previously in the Parish Council being awarded the Quality Gold Award from the National Association of Local Councils the Parish Council continues to consistently deliver high quality community events for residents. Marden at Christmas was another example of a high-quality event. To see the sheer excitement generated by Santa's Grotto and the village come alive in winter with families having fun is something that exemplifies the spirit of Christmas. Feedback from businesses and stallholders will inform next year's event which I'm confident will help enhance the event. Comments from residents was largely supportive as well, but requested we make efforts to encourage carol singing at the event.

The Summer Playscheme was once again a success, and it is hoped to be able to accommodate more children this year. On the 28th of March a retirement party was held at the John Banks Hall for Pat & John at the West End Stores to acknowledge their outstanding service to the community. During that day as well, totally unconnected, the Parish Council organised a Village Litter Pick, where 30-40 volunteers helped to clean up the village, including 10 Volunteer Police Cadets. This year marks the retirement of Dr Julie Morgan who has so caringly and professionally has served the community of 27 years.

As mentioned previously the Parish Council has sent a response to the Environmental Scoping Assessment for Land north of Marden which is an early document outlining the potential environmental issues a future planning application may need to address in detail. The scoping report is not to present final proposals, but to identify the likely significant impacts i.e. as on traffic, landscape, ecology, or noise and the methods that will be used to assess them. Accordingly, the Parish Council's comments are limited to whether the scope of these proposed assessments is appropriate and sufficiently comprehensive. At this stage we are not yet considering or determining the

merits of the development itself as this will be assessed if and when a full planning application is submitted.

The Parish Council is updating the Marden Neighbourhood Plan and on the 7th of March we held an Open Morning to outline the updated sections of the Plan. This was very well supported with approximately 50 residents attending. The work at Marden Academy is progressing well and we are looking forward to its completion and the new classrooms and other space that will be available to children in Marden.

As you may be aware the government has set out proposals for reform of local government and the Parish Council has given feedback on the future structure of new unitary structures. From the consultations to date we have given feedback to ensure we can continue to shape local priorities and act as a bridge to a larger unitary authority. We may also be consulted to consider taking on local facilities.

The resilience of local services was recently challenged with the water shortages affecting Marden and surrounding areas. Intense pressure was placed on residents when South-East Water was unable to supply water to residents. We are very grateful to the partnership working our Parish Clerk, Alison Hooker forged with Staplehurst Parish Council to make their bottled water station available to Marden residents and for her hands on work in loading those bottles of water into people's cars herself! We hope to continue to work closely with Staplehurst's Emergency Help Team in managing other emergencies that affect us potential other neighbouring parishes. In doing so we need the help of local volunteers and hopefully we will be able to recruit more volunteers in the future.

Staying on the theme of water related issues, I would also like to recognise the hard work of Councillor Kate Tippen in leading the flood wardens to cope with the flooding emergencies we experience. The team's speedy response to flooding is met with a speedy efficiency thanks to her leadership and continual lobbying of partner agencies on your behalf.

We are very grateful for the contributions our local policing team make to keeping the community safe. PC Chad Maskell, PC George Head and PCSO Rebecca Mount keep us updated on crime in Marden and attend regular police surgeries to make themselves accessible to local people. They are supported in this by Maidstone Borough Council's Community Protection Team, by Laura Bullen. The police are keen for as many residents as possible sign up to 'My Community Voice' in Kent, so that Kent Police can accurately respond to the priorities of local people and are keep us informed on how the police are responding in dealing with crime and anti-social behaviour.

Since the closure of the Children Centre and the lack of any youth service for young people in Marden we have approached Maidstone Borough Council and Golding Homes for support in securing some detached youth work in Marden. This has been harder than we anticipated but there is a possibility

that we can secure with our partners a Youth Activities Mini-Bus in the summer holidays through the support of Kent Cricket Foundation.

I am grateful for the work of our newest Councillor Neil Griffiths for accelerating the work to prepare for the refurbishing of the changing rooms on the Playing Field and I'm confident that work to convert the building into a much-needed local resource for the community may start soon. There also seems to be progress with Redrow in negotiations to prepare the allotments on Highwood Green for use by community. We are looking for the Allotment Society to help us in taking this forward.

Cllr Mike Summersgill has reinvigorated Speedwatch activity in Marden at a number of sites in an around the village and over the past few months the number of vehicles speeding at some locations has reduced. In addition, a few more volunteers have now being trained, so we can cover more locations.

I would also like to thank our Borough Councillors, Councillors Mike Summersgill, Grace Couch and Cllr Claudine Russell for their hard work on local issues of concern and their support and expertise they provide throughout the year.

Last, but not least, this year's Kent Association of Local Councils Community Award was awarded to Pat and John Wilkins for their 36 years' service at West End Stores where they have continually gone above and beyond for the community what could normally be expected from a village shop. The certificate was presented to them at their retirement party on 28th March 2026 by Cllr Kate Tippen.

5. COMMITTEE REPORTS

AMENITIES COMMITTEE REPORT

By Cllr Paul Dobinson, Chairman of Amenities

This was not read out but made available in the handout to those in attendance.

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. We also held a successful Village Litter Pick on Saturday 28th March.

Southons Field 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 is 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 and a girl's football team from Staplehurst is using the field for training.

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 shortly.

The field also hosts the Village Beacon and is where most of the large village events take place. Last year, the Beacon was lit on Thursday 8th May to commemorate VE Day 80, the Marden Motor Club Show on 24th May and the Rude Mechanicals Theatre Company performed on 27th June. This year we have the following events booked:

Saturday 23rd May – Marden Motor Show
Sunday 31st May – Russet Runners 10K Event
Thursday 18th June – Rude Mechanicals Event
Sunday 28th June – Marden in Bloom – Garden Safari
Friday 17th July – Marden Primary Academy – Year 6 Leavers Event
Saturday 5th September – Marden in Bloom – Scarecrow Safari

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

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. CCTV was installed which now covers the Youth Shelter and the rest of the field.

At the request of a resident, two fixed football goals were installed for those keen footballers to sharpen up and practice their football skills.

The old changing rooms will be refurbished and used as a small community space with three storage areas, a WC facility, small community room and kitchenette area. The planning application has been approved along with building regulations, and we are due to go out to tender in the next two months.

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.

There is an Annual Play Inspection carried out at the Marden Playing Field play area, Napoleon Drive play area and the play equipment at Southons Field by a Contractor to make sure all our play equipment is kept safe.

Marden Cemetery is a tranquil place of rest with a plethora of wildlife. We welcome Neil Watkins in May 2025 and he has done a sterling job at maintaining the Cemetery and Southons Field. We would like to thank Graham Carey for all his help and effort.

In the new Section 4 only headstones are permitted in the burial areas. For ease of maintenance, tending, 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.

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.

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 detailed Tree Audit is undertaken every three years by an external contractor.

Following the planting of a hedgerow, further hedging was planted earlier this year with the assistance of the Police Cadets. Leftover whips filled in areas of the Cemetery and Marden Playing Field which were planted by the Caretaker and Cemetery Groundsman.

Whilst the public conveniences 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.

The solar panel project is nearing completion with a licence between the Parish Council and Maidstone Borough Council due to be signed this month. Once this is finalised, structural work should commence shortly with the panels being installed following this. Baby changing facilities would then be installed.

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

The Parish Council 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 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. Further Councillors have also attained Carbon Literacy status.

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.

PARISH COUNCIL FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT

By Cllr Paul Dobinson, Chairman of Finance

This was not read out but made available in the handout to those in attendance.

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 28th October 2025 the Finance Committee met to receive the RFO's report to Councillors providing the income and expenditure forecast to 31st March 2026 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 2026/27. A further Finance Committee meeting was held on 4th November 2025 to review the budget further. These were approved by the Finance Committee at a meeting on 20th January 2026 and both the budget and precept for 2026/27 were ratified by Full Council at an Extra Ordinary Full Council Meeting on 27th January.

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, 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 2026 for a Band D taxpayer will be £104.39 per annum or £8.70 per month. This is an increase of £4.95 per year or £0.41 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 Mulberrys, an Internal Auditor, who is independent from the Council and an external audit undertaken at the end of the financial year by an auditor, currently Mazars, 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

PARISH COUNCIL PLANNING COMMITTEE REPORT

By Cllr Andy Turner, Chairman of Planning

2025/26 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 housing 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.

Proposed changes and updates to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) have meant that the Planning Committee has had work to do to formulate a response to the government consultations regarding Marden specifically.

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.

The Marden Neighbourhood Plan (MNP) review has been completed by the Neighbourhood Planning Team and is at Regulation 14 stage which is now being consulted on. Last month an open morning was held and part of this was to showcase the policy changes (under Regulation 14).

Details can be on the Parish Council's website, and the consultation is open until 17th April 2026. I would urge people that have an interest in the planning process to have a look and comment where possible.

This year 83 planning applications have come before the Council, which is slightly down on last year's 106. However, these have included the EIASCO for land North of the Marden and our own Planning Application for the refurbishment and extension to the changing rooms on the playing field.

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 FROM COUNTY & BOROUGH COUNCILLORS AND VILLAGE ORGANISATIONS

Cllr Brian Black, County Councillor for Marden

No verbal report given.

Cllrs Couch, Russell and Summersgill, Borough Councillors for Marden

The following written report was provided by all three Cllrs.

The Borough Election in May 2024 saw Claudine Russell re-elected as a Borough Councillor for the Ward, and 2 new Councillors elected from the Green Party, Michael Summersgill and Grace Couch; there was no election in 2025 or 2026, as the posts are for four years. The Council is still led by a Green & Independent Alliance and Liberal Democrat coalition, in minority control; a by-election in 2025 added three new ReformUK Councillors for one Ward, at the expense of three Independents.

Cllr. Russell leads the Conservative group on Maidstone Council (as well as now being a KCC Councillor for the Cranbrook Division) and is Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, holding the Cabinet to account on its policy directions; the topics that O&S have worked on this year have included assessing the Borough's Infrastructure provision via S.106 funding & Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) monies and reviewing the direction of Planning Enforcement.

Cllr. Summersgill's role as a Cabinet member changed in September 2025 from the portfolio covering Climate Transition & Nature Recovery to one covering Corporate Resources (which covers Budget and general Management), after an Independent councillor resigned her post. Mike has spent much of the half-year understanding the complexities of local government finance and preparing the budget for the coming financial year and what might change with Local Government Reorganisation (LGR); the latter is still a 'work in progress'! One legacy of his previous Cabinet role, which included updating the Council's Climate & Biodiversity strategy, was

rewarded by MBC achieving 'Gold Award' status in the Kent Wildlife Trust awards in March, alongside just one other Town/District Council.

Cllr. Couch continues to utilise her previous experience as a council officer (in Swale and London Boroughs) to be applied in her role as vice-chair of the Policy Advisory Committee (PAC), dealing with climate themes, corporate matters and environmental services. Grace has also been working to recruit youth representation on LGR consultation and at the citizen deliberation on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). She also brought a 'member agenda item request' to the Health committee, securing £10,000 for a project to tackle period poverty.

Across the Borough and Ward, all three of us have been involved closely in dealing with individual issues and problems of many constituents, which have covered a wide range of issues, as well as matters affecting the wider community like continuing fly-tipping activity and concerns over Traffic. We have liaised closely with the five Parish clerks and numerous councillors, to facilitate or assist queries that they have brought up, and that may need MBC action. There have been several speculative Housing applications, or threats of applications, recently that we continue to monitor. It has also been great to support Borough-wide initiatives such as the fourth Eco-Hub last Autumn, grants to KWT for river restoration, homes for social rent, the first electric bin lorry in Kent, as well as drone expansion, prosecutions and vehicles being seized as part of waste crime initiatives.

If the Local Government Reorganisation goes ahead within the current timeline all three Cllrs will be the last Maidstone Borough representatives for Marden.

Organisations and Residents:

A resident asked about the LGR and the Borough Cllrs explained what the current position is at the moment and what the possible changes will be.

Revd Nicky Harvey:

On behalf of the Church thanked the PC for the links between both groups. Church is now in a good position regarding maintenance with the bells now being used by visiting bell ringers. The Marden bellringing team has increased with 10 years olds also be part of the team.

Attendance is growing with 65/70 attending regularly with families attending activities held in the Church and Vestry Hall.

£83,000 has to be paid to Canterbury Diocese for this year. No money is received back from Canterbury or the Government.

Little Fishes Toddler Group is still running and is a wonderful activity for people to connect.

Community Lunches continue thanks to the team running this on Mondays.

Nick Ferguson-Gow – Motor Club

Marden Motor Club now has approx 40 members who meet regularly at the Village Club. The Motor Show this year is on 23rd May with at least 200 classic cars coming along. Fingers crossed for fantastic weather again.

Richard Adam – public transport:

Marden does not have a Train Users Group so Marden Parish Council represents the village. The step free access lift at the station, although no definite commitment, seems to be moving forward to fruition. MPC meets regularly with South Eastern and liaises with Network Rail.

Steve McArragher – Marden Society:

Marden Society Continue to run with afternoon sessions and attendance has increased.

Marden Walking Group, part of Marden Society, organises long and short distance walks.

Resident:

Horse and traps being taken onto playing field access via residential footpath and enquired when the field would be mown. The Clerk would look into the access points on the field and it was due to be mown this week.

There being no further business the Chairman the meeting closed at 20.05pm.

Signed:

Date:

Cllr
Chairman
Marden Parish Council