

BUSINESS PLAN



JULY 2022

MARDEN PARISH COUNCIL Herefordshire

Welcome and Introduction

This is Marden Parish Council's Business Plan and it lays out in detail the Council's Vision for the Parish over the next three years (2022 - 2025) and the projects planned which will deliver this.

What is a Parish Council Business Plan?

The Marden Parish Council Business Plan is a statement of the Council's vision for the parish, its purpose, values, objectives and priorities. It is a document that sets out what Marden Parish Council can achieve either directly or by working with local groups and Herefordshire Council.

The aim of the Business Plan is to give Marden residents a clear understanding of what the Parish Council does and what it intends to focus on over the next four years.

What is the Parish Council

The Parish Council (PC) has a maximum of eleven (currently nine) elected or co-opted, non-political volunteer councillors supported by a part time Parish Clerk.

It is the tier of local government closest to the public. The PC raises funds through the parish precept part of the local Council Tax, to pay for work and services in the parish. The Council is only able to act in relation to certain activities and these powers are handed down from Herefordshire Council or Central Government.

Common examples of local services provided by the PC include:

- Submitting comments on all planning applications and change of use applications in the parish as a consultee of the Local Planning Authority
- Develop and maintain a relevant Neighbourhood Development Plan
- Engage Parishioners to implement Herefordshire Council's Carbon reduction and biodiversity improvement plans
- Managing the Lengthsman scheme:
 - Roads
 - Verges
 - Drains
 - Signs
 - Grit bins

- Footpaths
- Maintenance work on:
 - Footpaths & Bridleways
 - Bus Shelters
 - Parish Environment
- Community Safety and Crime Reduction
- Provision of Litter Bins, Benches & Notice Boards
- Provision of small community grants.

About Marden

Marden is one of the largest parishes in Herefordshire, covering 1,396 hectares. Apart from the main village of Marden, there are the hamlets of Burmarsh, Urdimmarsh, The Vault, Venn's Green, the Vern and Litmarsh, with further scattered housing through the parish.

The 2011 census showed 1,302 residents living in 560 households. However, since then the parish has seen a lot of new building and conversion of disused farm buildings into housing and the number of houses is now around 640, with another 90 about to be developed.

Both Moreton and Laystone bridges are grade II* listed and Sutton Walls, a scheduled ancient monument, is on the edge of the parish, there are also over 50 other listed building including the parish church and 2 chapels.

Although much of the parish is farmland and rural, there is a large company growing, packing and distributing soft fruit and vegetables, as well as a small industrial estate, a water bottling plant and various small enterprises and home workers.

Why produce a Business Plan?

By creating a Business Plan the Parish Council has created a framework for it to work within. This will enable it to work in a more consistent and co-ordinated way and become proactive rather than reactive in its decision making. Also, the Business Plan will help residents to have a better understanding of what the Parish Council does and clarify what it doesn't do.

The Business Plan is intended to be a "live" document so it will be continuously reviewed and progress measured against key priorities.

There are plans for the current Neighbourhood Development Plan to be updated in line with Herefordshire Council's Core Strategy review over the next 2.5 years, which will cover the period to 2041.

The current vision is unlikely to change:
By 2031 Marden will have grown proportionately and will remain a rural parish and village. It will continue to have a strong sense of identity and have a vibrant village centre. The smaller surrounding hamlets and countryside will have been protected from over-development.

The Parish Council's work covers seven main areas:

1. Climate and Biodiversity Emergency Actions and Being a Sustainable and Biodiverse Community
2. Communication & Management
3. Planning
4. Finance
5. Parish Maintenance and Public Rights of Way
6. Traffic Improvements
7. Major Projects



Climate Emergency and Being a Sustainable and Biodiverse Community

Climate Emergency

“A sustainable society must be socially responsible, focussing on environmental protection and dynamic equilibrium in human and natural systems.” Sustainability, therefore, is the environment and the people. Many parishioners wish to live in a way that will not only preserve and protect the rural identity but also work towards a parish which supports every member of the community and is age diverse.

The Environmental and Sustainability Group is a working group with members from the Parish Council and Parishioners. It is working to develop a strategy which will protect the environment, reduce the parish’s carbon footprint by increasing its biodiversity and socially develop the area whilst maintaining local employment, with businesses behaving responsibly and with a central focus for the parish with a community hub.

The Group keeps up-to-date and develops ideas with reference to current climate change thinking and aims to develop ways in which the parish can reduce its carbon footprint. It also supports all the efforts made by individuals, e.g. the recycling bins, insulating homes, reducing car journeys, increased walking and cycling, recycling.

The aims of the Group are to:

- Improve the environment through re-wilding certain areas thereby encouraging biodiversity

- Look into transport issues and develop a more sustainable system including electric car charging points
 - Follow the NDP and reduce the destruction of hedges and biodiverse habitat whilst limiting unsuitable developments
Encourage people to change habits through the presentation of solutions e.g. saving energy, minimising waste and promoting plastic reduction. Promote this through the ‘tips’ in News and Views (N&V)
 - Take advantage of any support available through government
 - Carry out promotional activities through the available communication channels (Community & PC Websites, N&V and Facebook), stalls at events, talks, information dissemination etc.
- If you have any ideas which would support the aims, please contact a Parish Councillor or the Clerk or join the Group.

Being a Sustainable Community

In essence a sustainable community is one in which the community is committed to promote sustainable living. Marden Parish Council aims to achieve this by working with parishioners over time, so that by 2041 all will have :

- Access to clean air and water
- A low carbon biodiverse environment
- Economic opportunities
- A safe and healthy place to raise children
- Affordable, environmentally sound places of shelter
- Opportunities for life-long learning
- A sense of belonging to a community where there is mutual support and responsibility
- A democratic say in the decisions which affect their daily lives.

The Parish Council with the parishioners of Marden will on a regular basis:

- Develop community assessments of current conditions
- Draw up trend analyses
- Create vision statements
- Agree annual action plans
- Agree the necessary tools to implement the agreed action plans.

Communication & Management

The Parish Council strives to be a professional, competent and caring Parish Council, to be open and accountable in all it does and to ensure sound financial management.

The Council has adopted many policies to demonstrate its commitment to ensuring openness, transparency and good governance. All documents are available in full on the Parish Council website.

The Parish Council aims to assist in the creation of a socially inclusive and economically viable community embracing all residents irrespective of age, culture, income, race or religion and which seeks to develop their well-being, knowledge, understanding and mutual co-operation.

The Council will promote and encourage the provision of a range of leisure, social, recreational and community educational facilities in the parish, appropriate to the normal activities of a rural parish.

The Parish Council aims to:

- Achieve improved communication, leading to better feedback and decision-making

- Encourage engagement of parishioners with the Council by providing better information and communication channels
- Promote public participation at meetings and during wider community events
- Take on board all feedback either negative or positive
- Increase awareness and understanding of the Neighbourhood Development Plan, its purpose and relevance
- Improve the skills of councillors and staff by undertaking appropriate and cost-effective training
- Keep abreast of opportunities and policy requirements
- Continue engagement with the larger businesses in the parish and encourage open discussion.

The Parish Council has already completed a significant re-write of the Parish Council website which went live in 2021 along with the creation of a specific Parish Council Facebook page for more immediate communication.

A rewrite of the Community Website, to be rebranded as “Marden Links”, will be available in 2022, along with a revamped hard copy of the Marden Community Guide, which will be distributed to all parishioners on an annual basis.

The Parish Council’s communication strategy is to continue to provide the right information, to the right people, in the right medium and at the right time. Marden Parish Council has developed a set of core communication channels (new websites and Facebook page) to provide information and support.

The Council will continue to provide relevant & timely information to existing communication channels such as News & Views, Community Facebook Pages and the Community Guide.

Planning

A major part of the Parish Council's role is to comment on planning applications within and bordering the parish. The Council's opinion is important as it gives the local view. However, the planning authority, Herefordshire Council, has the ultimate say whether to approve, refuse and apply conditions to a planning application.

The cornerstone for commenting on every local application is the Marden Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) which was 'made' adopted in 2016. This was developed after full consultation with the parish and gives the blueprint for how the parish should develop up to 2031. A review of the NDP has now started to ensure the requirements of the current and updated Core Strategy and the NPPF are met.

Other key documents that are used by the Parish Council to respond to, and by Herefordshire planners to determine, an application are Herefordshire's Core Strategy (currently being reviewed), the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and material grounds laid down by law. To ensure that the parish councillors are up-to-date with relevant policy and process, all councillors undertake relevant training.

When a parishioner submits an application, it will really help the Council if you can attend the parish council meeting when your application is being considered, so that the Parish Council has a full picture of all the details. The Council looks forward to seeing you.

If you would like to see the documents that the Council refers to and how meetings are conducted, these can be found on the parish council website or contact the Parish Clerk who will be happy to help.



Laystone Bridge -
a grade 2* listed structure

Finance

The work of the parish council is funded by the parish precept. This is part of your council tax bill.

It funds many items including:

- Administration & Management - websites, room hire, subscriptions, elections, audit fees etc
- Maintenance - Lengthsman and Public Rights of Way upkeep and improvement, parish enhancement
- Services - Marden Links (parish hub), News & Views printing; grants and reserves - small grants, old churchyard, support for Marden Village Trust and Marden Recreation Ground Trust
- Projects & Working Groups - Neighbourhood Development Plan, Fundraising, Community Facilities project,

- Environment & Sustainability
- Salary & Training - Clerk's salary, training for Councillors.

VAT is paid but it can be reclaimed at the end of the financial year and there is also a contingency amount within the budget. Reserves are held for major projects, such as the Public Works Loan for the new community centre and for grant support.

Councillors receive an accounts statement at every PC meeting, so continuous budget monitoring takes place. At least twice a year, a Financial Advisory Working Group of Councillors meets to monitor financial management & issues and recommends financial proposals for the full council to consider.

There is an interim Internal Audit in November-December undertaken by an independent person, who also undertakes the end-of-year accounts Internal Audit in April-May in preparation for the submission of the Annual Governance & Accountability Return (AGAR). This includes a period of Public Rights to inspect the accounts during the External Audit process.

Legally, the Parish Council has to employ a Responsible Financial Officer to manage its finances and accounts. This is part of the Parish Clerk's role. The Council has to comply with various laws and regulations when spending parish funds.

Parish Maintenance and Public Rights of Way

Parish Maintenance

Marden Parish is a beautiful part of Herefordshire and the Parish Council aims to keep the parish looking attractive and well maintained. As with many things, there is a limited budget for this and the Parish Council is grateful for sponsorship and support from local companies to help improve the parish.

A parish contractor (Lengthsman) is employed on your behalf, to do specialist work such as highways and drainage, mowing and work to upgrade the footpath network. Currently, volunteers undertake litter picking, planting to provide colour and the roles of Parish Footpath Officer and Tree Warden.

The Parish Council would like to expand volunteer work in the parish to include jobs such as painting bus shelters, Neighbourhood Watch or just reporting suspicious behaviour. Volunteers are offered training, protection equipment, insurance and support as needed. If you can help, please contact the Parish Clerk or come to a council meeting.

Public Rights of Way (PROW)

Public Rights of Way (PROW) are a vital asset for the parish and the community. PROW usually cross private land and both landowners and users of PROW have responsibilities and rights. These are outlined on the parish council website PROW page.

Serious problems with dogs being off lead and dog poo not being cleared up causes harm - and even death - to farm animals every year.

Please be a responsible dog owner and keep your dog(s) on a lead on footpaths. Dogs are only allowed to walk on a footpath, not over the fields.

The parish has a Parish Footpath Officer (PFO) who: monitors PROW within the parish; liaises with landowners to ensure the PROW are in a suitable and legal state; volunteers on behalf of Herefordshire Council; and liaises with the parish council. Contact details for the PFO can be found in News & Views and the parish council website.

Problems with PROW can be reported to Herefordshire on 01432 383 550 or online at PROW@herefordshire.gov.uk or to the PFO.

Marden PROW can be seen on the map on the parish council website, paper copies can be found in the BT box or by accessing the Definitive Map through this link <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/government-citizens-and-rights/explore-herefordshire-map>

Traffic Improvements

A Traffic Management Group has been formed to develop proposals that will lead to improvements in general safety and reduction in traffic speed throughout the village. The Parish Council is currently asking for ideas from parishioners which will then be reviewed and discussed with the Safer Roads Partnership, Police and Balfour Beatty for viability.

The aim will be to develop a short and long term plan. Items that can be actioned quickly could be funded from Parish Council reserves, longer term more costly solutions would be funded from payments (Section 106) for traffic improvements from the New House Farm development.

Major Projects

Several projects are planned to be completed over the next few years.

Community Facilities

Community consultation continues to support the need for improved facilities, although the Opinion Poll held throughout February 2022 clearly indicated that the proposal to add an additional £200k to a Public Works Loan was not acceptable (perhaps understandable given the current financial pressures as a result of rising inflation and fuel prices).

The planning approval for the New House Farm development including the community centre is still awaited. Whilst the decision is awaited, there is an opportunity to look at other potential funding options by working with the Academy, Marden Village Trust and Marden Pre-School to find a holistic solution that provides long term sustainability for the Parish.

The Parish Council's desire remains to build a new community centre and village green on the land to be gifted on the New House Farm development site.

Given the existing constraints of planning application approval (phosphate issue) and the transfer of land to the Parish Council, it is still hoped that a new facility will be open at some point in 2024.

Marden Links



Marden Links

Marden Links was initiated in early 2022 as a virtual hub to develop and build an accessible and inclusive community by creating an information and signposting service, in conjunction with Herefordshire's wider Talk Communities hubs.

In addition, the aim is to promote sharing of skills and knowledge within the community for the good of all, supporting wellbeing and independence for those who live and work in the Parish. Once appropriate community facilitators become available, Marden Links will add in-person support.

An initial grant from Herefordshire Talk Community has allowed the existing outdated community website to be redesigned to meet current and future requirements. For more immediate information sharing the existing Parish Council Facebook page will be enhanced and link with the growing number of community Facebook pages.

2022 will see an updated version of the written Parish Guide that will then be updated annually. There are several volunteers already to support this initiative, but more would be welcomed.

If you would like to become a volunteer please email mardenlinks@gmail.com

Parish Improvements

Over the next three years the Parish Council would like to build on the fine work that the Gardeners' Association has undertaken within the village. Future work will be identified and actioned, both within the village and the wider parish. Volunteers and ideas for improvements are always welcome.

The Parish Council has just purchased environmentally-friendly replacement noticeboards. During the remainder of 2022, the old noticeboards will be removed and replaced with larger ones, which have accessible glass covers suitable for parishioners to post appropriate items alongside Parish Council Items.



MARDEN PARISH COUNCIL

CONTACT DETAILS

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