

Marden Parish Council

Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on Tuesday 20th February 2024 at 7.30pm at the Marden Community Centre.

Present:

Cllr David Bennett (Chair), Cllr Kate Ryan, Cllr Chris Morgan, Cllr Mike Blake, Cllr Rod Lees & Cllr Lesley Hayward.

In Attendance:

Richard James (Clerk) and 5 members of the Public.

1. To receive Apologies.

To Note – Apologies from Cllr Paula Barrett & Cllr Richard Paske.

2. To receive declarations of interest and written requests for dispensations.

To Note – There was no declarations of interest or written requests for dispensations.

3. To approve the minutes of the meeting held on the 16th January 24.

Resolution – The minutes of the meeting held on 16.01.24 were adopted as a true record and then signed by the Chair after a small amendment on page 58, Question 5 to change 8% to £4000.00.

4. Open Session.

Ward Member – Cllr Peter Hamblin.

Cllr Peter Hamblin the Ward Member was not present again nor were apologies received. The Chair said while there is no legal obligation to attend Parish Council meetings the role of the Ward Member is an important conduit between Herefordshire Council and the Parish Council especially on matter such as planning. This clearly came to light in the recent Drakeley Farm application when the planning officer, stated the Ward Member was given the information on this application and inferred that he would liaise with the Parish Council and the residents.

Resolution – The Council agreed to formally write to the Chief Executive of the Herefordshire Council and the leader of the Council. About the poor attendance and moreover the total lack of communication, either in writing, email or telephone.

Public Session.

Prior to the public session Cllr Morgan wanted to make a statement, following recent e-mails received by Councillors and on the behaviour of some of the members of the public at previous meetings, during the public session. In his statement he said and highlighted certain things.

I fully understand that challenging decisions is a necessary part of a sound working democracy. Challenge can come from within and from without and for a civil society to flourish challenge must be respectful.

The role of the Parish Councillor is a voluntary one, without pay, they represent the views of the residents of the Parish to the Parish Council and have the best interest of the parishioners at heart.

I have sat here for nearly three years, I have listened to genuine concerns being voiced, I have listened to members of the public genuinely seeking to better understand the workings of the local democracy through their questioning. I have seen a committed chair patiently and sensitively responding to

questions, all of which has filled me with encouragement and hope.

In sharp contrast I have sat here and witnessed disrespectful attacks from a couple of residents on the role of the chair which have now strayed too often in the personal domain. These attacks have now begun to widen out in meetings and emails, including the whole council. Some of the unfounded comments made by these individuals are the Parish Council offer great entertainment, the lack of queries from Councillors and don't offer alternatives to the ideas of the Chair.

The threats of Data Protection, the constant Freedom of Information requests, and the attempts through micro questioning to run council affairs from outside. All this amounts to bullying and harassment – no more and no less it is degrading, costly and distracting.

Members of the public asked the following questions.

Q1 – A resident was concerned about the recent flooding at Burmarsh Lane. Balfour Beatty engineer had been out to the location, but nothing has been done to date.

A1 – The chair said he would discuss the matter with the Locality Steward, while on their Parish drive around which was planned for the following day.

Q2 – A resident asked what the architect invoice of £3600 was for.

A2 – The clerk explained this was for engineering calculations and drawings for the drainage system.

Q3 – A resident asked what the architect invoice of £1500 was for.

A3 – The clerk reported this was for engineer's calculations to alter the structural plan, so a solid floor could be installed over the kitchen and toilet area, thus allowing additional storage.

Q4 – A resident ask what the timescale for Stage 4 of the community project was.

A4 – The chair reported that it was hoped that the build would be ready to start around June/July 24 with a target completion of no later than September 2025.

Q5 – Will the Parish Council have access to the project site.

A5 – It is hoped the site will be signed over to the Parish Council in April and there will only be foot access until such time as the roads and vehicle entrance has been made.

5. Footpaths Officer Report & to consider actions.

To Note – The written report was noted, and the Footpaths officer was to be thanked.

6. Finance Matters.

6.1 - Financial Report

6.2 – Bank Accounts – 31.01.24

6.2.1 – Unity Main - £78,678.81

6.2.2 – Unity Marden Links - £607.96

6.2.3 – Unity Reserve - £1115.04

Resolution –

(6.1) – The Financial report was discussed and approved.

(6.2) – The Bank Account statements were presented to the council and approved.

7. Payments.

	Payments	Net	Vat	Total
7.1	Clerks Salary – January 24	As per Contract		
7.2	Clerks Expenses – January 24	381.86	73.50	455.36
7.3	S Lewis – Electric – January 24	319.33	0.00	319.33
7.4	W Architecture Ltd	1500.00	300.00	1800.00
7.5	PIP Printing – 76357 – News & Views	307.16	0.00	307.16
7.6	DC Gardening Services - January 24	195.00	39.00	234.00

Resolution – All the Payments were approved for payment.

8. Payments made under emergency policy and regular payments.

		Payment	Net	Vat	Total
8.1	D/D	BT – Broadband & Phone – January 24- Unity Bank	28.95	5.79	34.74
8.2	S/O	HUB Rent – February 24	450.00	0.00	450.00
8.3	S/O	Community Garden – Rent – February 24	15.00	0.00	15.00
8.4	D/D	O2 Mobile Phone – January 24	12.90	2.58	15.48
8.5	BACS	Morton on Lugg Parish Council – Marden Links Advert	30.00	0.00	30.00

Resolution – The payments made under emergency policy were Approved and the Direct Debit and Standing Order payments were noted.

9. Clerks Expenses – Invoices

		Payment	Net	Vat	Total
9.1		EU-Host – Hosting Websites	118.10	23.62	141.72
9.2		EU-Host – Domain - marden-links.org	11.99	2.40	14.39
9.3		The Ramp People	182.50	36.50	219.00
9.4		Gazebo Sides	54.87	10.98	65.85

To Note – These invoices were noted.

10. Planning

	Application No	Address	Permission Sought
10.1	P240175/F	Site adjacent to Paradise Meadows Marden HR1 3FA	Proposed dwelling, garage and ancillary works

Resolution – Marden Parish Council **OBJECTED** to this application on the following grounds. (1) Concern about the increase in rainwater run-off. (2) the balcony over looks neighbouring properties. (3) Concerns the applicant is only thinking of using heat pump and solar, it should be a condition. (4) Main drainage is going to be used and there is no mention of phosphate levels.

	Application No	Address	Permission Sought
10.2	P240117/F	The Withies Marden Herefordshire HR1 3EZ	Application for variation of a condition 8 following grant of planning permission 231496 (Proposed dwelling and detached garage) - to allow revision of treatment plant.

Resolution – Marden Parish Council will make **NO COMMENT** on this application.

10.3 - Planning Enforcement.

The clerk reported the following.

- a) Pikestye Farm. – The enforcement officer is awaiting an update.
- b) Small Ashes. – There are No outstanding planning enforcement issues on this application.
- c) Ashgrove Croft. – The enforcement officer and agent are going to arrange a site visit.
- d) Berrington Bower. – Planning enforcement say this matter is closed.

Resolution – *With regard to Berrington Bower, the Parish Council agreed for the clerk to ask for a new enforcement officer to re-look at the whole application.*

10.4 – Drakeley Farm, Marden, HR1 3ES. – Planning Committee 17.01.24 at 10am.

Councillors were disappointed with the planning discussion of this application, and the lack of support received from the Ward Member in supporting the Parish Council and the residents of the parish in their object. Refer to item 4 of this agenda.

Resolution – *It was agreed to make sure that all the conditions attached to this planning approval were regular scrutinised and adhered too.*

11. Community Project Working Group

The chair said the project was moving at speed and the next stage would be going out to tender. The working group had met three times to discuss matters relating to the project. Both the chairs of the Parish Council and the Marden Village Trust had met with a solicitor to discuss the matter of an agreement for the purchase of a lease for the MVT to manage and run the building. The solicitor was confident that this could be achieved in a lawful manner, complying with Parish Council and the Charity Commission regulations. The estimated cost of drawing up a lease would be between £2k and £5k. It is planned to finalise this work by April.

The working group had come up with a working name “**Marden Parish Hall**” and a domain name should be purchased (Dot.co.uk). Separately, a page will be created on the Marden Links website to provide information and status updates on the progress the project build.

The clerk said that the working group is made up of Parish Councillors and Marden Village Trust members and it will play an important function in the day to day managing of a project tender a build, supporting the Architect who is also project manager. The working group does not have authority to approve anything as this has to be done by the Parish Council. The working group sorts out the wheat from the chaff and brings back proposals to the Parish Council.

Working groups don’t have a Chair they have a lead; they don’t have to take any minutes or notes and they are not open to the public for the following reasons:

- (1) To discuss matters freely and openly without fear.
- (2) To discuss sensitive contractual information.
- (3) To make recommendations to the Parish Council.

The working group discussed questions asked by the architect and after lengthy debate, now brings them to the Parish Council to note. The architect needs confirmation on the following to progress as part of draft tender to be reviewed and endorsed at the next Parish Council meeting along with items to be costed in the wish list.

- (1) The heating of the building and the water using a gas boiler.

This was chosen solely on cost, as heat pumps or other eco options are, at this time, far too expensive to purchase and install given the current estimated funding for this project. The proposed electric heaters were also discarded because of the high running costs.

- (2) The finishing of the ceiling in the main halls.

It was agreed to just have the finished surface of the roof boards.

- (3) Underfloor Heating Underfloor Heating was the preferred option, but again cost was a major issue, it was agreed to add the pipework under the floor, which then could be connected at a later date when funds became available.

- (4) To present a wish list for items which are currently felt to be unaffordable.

A wish list is to identify items which we would like included in the build but are potentially too expensive to add to the base tender. The Parish Council had to be mindful of any changes to the tender design would have cost implications and could be cheaper to sort once a contractor had been appointed.

Noted - The report of the proposed changes to the draft tender.

- (1) The heating of the building and water should be Gas.
 (2) The ceiling in the main hall is to be finished by the roof board.
 (3) The inclusion of under floor heating pipes in the main halls and lobby.
 (4) Wish List to include things like, Heat pump heating system, solar panels, CCTV, Intruder alarm, electric car charging points in the carpark, outside solar lighting.

Resolution - The Parish Council agreed. To purchase the domain name for the build "Marden Parish Hall" .co.uk and also have a page about the project build from start to finish on the Marden Link website.

12. Working Group Reports.

12.1a – Marden Links HUB.

The HUB continues to be well supported and the winter soup initiative will be coming to an end at the end of February. But grateful thanks must go to Lesley and Lorina who made the soup and made it a success.

The Café is open 2pm till 4pm Wednesday, and Friday, if there were a few more volunteers the café could be open longer or additional days.

The leaflet drops and advertising is proving a success and new faces do attend from time to time, but there is still a core membership.

The HUB has received net donations from kind residents of £466.40.

To Note – *The report was noted.*

12.1b – Repair Café.

The repair café continues to be well supported, even if January was a quite month, but this picked back up again in February with £50 in donations. Regular reminders that the repair café is open, and meeting do work, and this will continue. The repair café is looking at working with the Herefordshire Council to run a Cycle Repair event part of the Bike ready scheme.

The repair café continues to stand on its own two feet within the grant it has received and the donations to date from kind residents of £445.00.

To Note – *The report was noted.*

12.1c – Community Garden.

Work towards providing a community garden had continued over the last few months, A source for free hedging and shrubs has been identified, fencing and raised bed materials quotes agreed and a shipping container has now been sourced and a quote received for the associated ground works of £700.00.

However, it now transpires that there is a boundary dispute which now needs to be resolved

before this project progresses further.

Resolution – *It was agreed to put the community garden project on hold until the dispute can be resolved.*

12.1d - Environmental & Sustainability update

To Note – *Has not meet, but the meeting has been arranged for the 4th March 2024.*

12.2 – Neighbourhood Development Plan Review Working Group.

The Herefordshire Council will be holding 2 Teams meetings to discuss the new Core Strategy and potential new build sites within the County. The Teams meetings have been arranged for Tuesday 19th March at 2pm and Wednesday 20th March at 7pm.

To Note – *Cllr D Bennett and Cllr K Ryan wanted to attend the meeting on the 19th at 2pm. Cllr R Lees said he would like to attend the meeting on the 20th at 7pm.*

12.3 – Financial Advisory Working Group

To Note – *Has not met.*

13 Community.

13.1 – Bench at Volunteer Pub

The clerk reported that the resident had been back in touch after the Parish Councils decision last month. They said the benches on the other side of the road are on the grass verge and the elderly and infirm struggle to climb the grass verge to the bench. Also, the bus will not stop if you are not stood on the side of the bus stop. The resident believes there is highways owned land near the bus stop.

To Note – *The chair will raise the issue with the locality steward when he has his parish inspection.*

13.2 – Tree growing in Bridge and River blocked with fallen trees.

The clerk had been shown pictures of a tree growing out of the stone bridge and trees blocking the river and they had concerns about flooding.

To Note – *The chair will raise this with the locality steward.*

14 Clerk Update.

14.1 - Lengthsman Grant 24/25.

The clerk reported that Balfour Beatty had lost the lengthsman agreement and were refusing to pay the Parish Council its grant.

The clerk inquired on where the Parish Council wanted to retain the services of the current lengthsman for 2024/25.

The clerk asked if the last year's schedule of works would be the same for 2024/25.

The clerk had summited the expression of interest forms for lengthsman grant funding for 2024/25.

Resolution – *The Parish Council agreed the retain the services of the current lengthsman and the same work schedule and for the clerk to investigate the missing agreement.*

14.2 - Communications – Shared Folder

The clerk said that due to the ever-increasing number of council papers, a Councillor Shared Folder would be the way to go. This means that the Councillors will be able to access council

papers. The clerk is also going to add past council papers allowing councillors have an easy access to past information. The clerk will continue to send out the Parish Council Agenda via email as well as it being in the shard folder.

Resolution – *The Parish Council agreed for this to happen.*

15 Future Agenda Items or Clerk action under delegated authority.

- *West Mercia Police contract*
- *Agree a delay into using the Scribe accounting system operationally.*
- *Parish Meeting date.*

The Chair closed the meeting at 9.28pm.



Signed:
Chair of the Council

Date: 19th March 2024.