

Marden Annual Parish Meeting

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting of Marden held on Tuesday 16th May 2023
at 6.30pm in the Community Centre.

Present: Cllr David Bennett (Chair)

In Attendance:

Richard James (Clerk)

Kate Austin-Bailey (Talk Community Development Officer)

Jess Tidball (Marden Village Trust)

Mike Williams (Marden Recreation Ground)

3 x Parish Councillor's

2 x Members of the Public

1. Welcome by the Chair.

Cllr David Bennett welcome the speakers and members of the public to the meeting.

2. Apologies for Absence.

Apologies were received from Cllr's Rod Lee & Paula Barrett.

3. Approve the Minutes of the last Annual Parish Meeting.

The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on the 16th May 2022 were ADOPTED and signed.

4. Presentation by Talk Community Development Officer.

Kate Austin-Bailey (Talk Community Development Officer) addressed the meeting explaining the role of talk community within the County. Talk Community Hubs are buildings (or parts of buildings) which deliver community services, these HUBs are led and run by the community and are open and accessible to everyone. This also means their purpose can change over time to adapt to the needs of the local community. Local HUBs form part of a larger valuable countywide network, helping connect residents with the support, services, groups, and activities they may need, within their local area or across the county.

One of the important points with regards to the local HUB is that it can offer services to the community who may not otherwise be able to access, from Health Advice, Money Advice, Computer training, help in accessing funding for community groups and so much more. The HUBs are designed to be a two-way street, listening to the needs of the community, and feeding it back into the Herefordshire Council, to better adapt their policies.

HUBs are a safe and warm place where people of all ages can meet up and talk about their concerns, normally over a cup of tea and a piece of cake.

A full list of all the services Talk Community offer can be found at www.talkcommunitydirectory.org

There were questions from the public about

Q1. How is Talk Community funded.

A1. It is funded by the Herefordshire Council Adult Directorate.

Q2. Do you use a Pro Active approach and do things like Computer training.

A2. YES, they support Local HUBs for things like training if there is a community need.

Q3. Do you work with Refugees like those housed at the Three Counties Hotel

A3. YES, most probably if they were approached and their needs were not being met by other parts of the Herefordshire Council.

Q4. A question was raised regarding differing hire rates between general groups and the Pre-School.

A4. This question has been raised many times by the same parishioner and the answer remains the same. There is no hourly rate for the Pre-School, an annual rental was agreed in 2017, the last time rental rates were increased across the board.

Q5. A request was made for the parish Council to consider putting more money into PROW, something a lot of parishioners benefitted from.

A5. Marden now has some of the best kept public rights of way in the area. The parish Council seeks to provide financial support where appropriate. The budget and actual expenditure has increased over recent years and the Parish Council will continue investment in appropriate enhancements.

5. Report from the Parish Council.

The Chair of the Parish Council presented his report.

Some general comments.

The highlight of the last year has undoubtedly been the many well supported parish events such as the Jubilee Big lunch, the Christmas Cracker, and the opening of the Marden Links Parish Hub. It has been wonderful to see so many of you attending and supporting these activities.

Alison Sutton retired as Clerk at the end June. Unfortunately, her replacement resigned early this year for a variety of reasons. We wish him well and hope to see him helping at upcoming community focused events. As of April, we have a new clerk, Richard James, who is just easing himself into a very busy role.

Marden has a very active Parish Council, and its working groups are supported by many volunteers. In total 32 Council / working group meetings were held during the year, all but one open to the public. They included 12 Parish Council, 5 Marden Links Parish Hub, 4 Environmental & Sustainability work group, 3 Financial Advisory group, 6 Fundraising group, 1 Community Facilities group, and 1 Neighbourhood Development Plan group meeting.

Planning

The review of planning applications represents a significant part of parish council time. In all there were some 27 applications in the last year, 15 were supported and 12 with objections. Of these Herefordshire Council has approved 12, refused 4 and the remainder are still the pipeline.

As a Council we try to ensure the planning process is upheld. The Council and the Ward Councillor have raised several issues with enforcement. Unfortunately, almost all the concerns raised in the last year have not received an adequate response from Herefordshire Council.

Lengthsman

General maintenance has continued in line with the agreed monthly plan. As a council we continue to minimise grass cutting in the early part of the growing year to allow the wild plants to flower first.

The drainage issues still persist at times of heavy rainfall. While we have received grant funding to clear and jet drains throughout the parish drainage issues still appear in two key areas. Both are well known but are unfortunately low on Herefordshire Councils priority list for repair due to the high cost involved.

Parish Plan & Budget Documents

The Parish Council endeavours to be as transparent as possible with its communication to parishioners. Two key documents were published and delivered to all households The Business Plan was updated to reflect planned activities through to the end of 2025. Also, each year the Parish Council produces an

update on progress made against the latest plan along with proposals for the next year's budget and Precept.

Finances

The Parish Council remains in a very healthy position and able to meet known current and future requirements. It ended the financial year with a surplus £19k, mainly due to the limited progress on the community facilities project. We currently have over £114k in reserves, £94k of which has been earmarked for the development of a village green and new community centre. General reserves stand at a little over £16k.

To provide financial oversight, the Financial Advisory Group met on several occasions with its principal activities being to review the year end accounts and develop the proposed budget for the coming year. Only one internal audit has been carried out this financial year.

In recent years there has been a move to using online banking. In fact, only one cheque was written in the last financial year! In order to improve the controls in the current online environment we are planning to move to Unity bank. At the same time, we will open a deposit / savings account for reserves in order to take advantage of the higher interest rates available.

A number of working groups have been active during the past year:

(All working groups include parishioners as members and meetings are open to the public)

1. Environmental & Sustainability Work Group

This group's main focus over the last 12 months has been communication and increasing parishioner awareness of the Environment and ways to reduce our impact and improve the Parish.

A number of articles have been published in N&V and on our website and local social media. We also ran 2 key events in the village hall, one looking at how we can reduce our carbon footprint and the other on the proposed changes to the Herefordshire Council waste collection service.

At the Queen's Platinum Jubilee event we ran a stall giving away wildflower seeds to try and encourage parishioners to help our pollinating insects.

Moving forward, the group needs to decide how best to link in with the Parish Hub and decide where the priorities lie. Additionally, there have been a number of changes within the Herefordshire Green Network and the Great Collaboration, and the group need to re-establish appropriate links.

2. Neighbourhood Development Plan

In early 2022, Herefordshire Council began its own review of the Core Strategy which will cover the period 2021 to 2041.

The Parish Council & Neighbourhood Development Group have reviewed and responded to a number of consultation papers released by Herefordshire Council in 2022.

Herefordshire Council plan to share their draft strategy and discuss the proposed housing targets in the coming months. For this Parish, once again, the most significant impact will be that of the proposed housing requirement and the potential changes to settlement boundaries. The biggest challenge will be that of ensuring necessary improvements are made to the parish infrastructure prior to, or part of, approval for any further development.

3. Marden Links

The group's objective is to promote sharing of skills and knowledge within our community for the good of all and to support wellbeing and independence for those who live and work in our Parish.

The last year has seen a significant expansion in activities. Up until October last year Marden links operated as a virtual hub with its main focus being communication through a recently completed website and Facebook page. In October the opportunity arose to rent a unit in the heart of Walkers Green and

thus the physical Hub was created and guided by a newly formed working group with weekly sessions from mid-December being run by a dedicated group of volunteers. To date 44 two-hour sessions have been run with 352 attendees supported by 10 regular volunteers.

Significant effort went into setup with some very generous donations, grant funding from Talk Community along with start-up support and general running costs funded by the Parish Council.

The Hub has and will be used for items of community betterment. Over the last six months it has been booked for 6 Social Prescribing sessions, Talk Community regional meetings and very recently for the Marden Election polling Station which allowed the Academy and Pre-School to remain open.

More recently the group has looked to start a Repair Café on one Saturday morning each month, again, the start-up has been supported by a grant from Herefordshire Council. The first session will be held on Saturday June 3rd where repairers will be available eager and willing. As with the Hub sessions, we will start small and see how we go.

Also, the Parish Council has obtained a long-term lease on the land behind the Hub, the intent being to convert the space into a quiet and peaceful community garden. In the summer it will benefit from sunshine from dawn to dusk. Currently, the site is being cleared and appropriate fencing will be installed. Ideas are being gathered and potential proposals will be more widely circulated to parishioners. It is hoped to involve as many of you as possible in this project from the very beginning. You will hear much more in the coming months.

4. **Community Facilities**

The project is now in its eighth year. The Parish Council believes there is a chance that the parish will have a new community centre by the end of the tenth year!

The planning applications for the New House Farm development and the New Community Centre and Village Green are imminent. The funding model has been reviewed over the last 12 months and a proposal to the parish is being developed and communicated as we speak.

5. **The Events (& fundraising) group**

This group has had a very busy year providing well supported community events.

Last summer saw the Platinum Jubilee Big Lunch, the very positive feedback from that event lead to the Christmas Cracker and most recently the Coronation tea. All three events have been extremely well attended and many of you have made very favourable comments.

In addition, this year, the group has already held very successful quiz and a race nights. Plans for the rest of this year are, a Marden Community Fete in July, another Quiz night in October and a Marden Christmas Cracker in December.

6. **The Transport Working Group**

Following the demise of the Speed watch activities the group does not anticipate meeting until the NHF S106 funds are known to be available. At which point the group will look at appropriate improvements within the parish.

Bridge strikes have continued to be a feature over the last year with Herefordshire Council's promised study into how such events might be avoided in the future, while completed, is still awaited by the Parish Council.

All working groups rely very much on volunteers, and we should thank each and every one as they have contributed so much to improving the wellbeing of all parishioners. To continue and expand what we have started we would welcome additional members and / or volunteers to any of our groups.

Moving on to a summary of other key Parish Council Activities.

Local Businesses

We have continued to maintain contact with the major businesses that operate within the parish, the objective being to ensure that appropriate communication is timely and flows both ways. It is unfortunate that S&A appear to have stopped the Community Liaison meetings but on a more positive note, we should thank S&A for funding the 2022 Xmas tree, enjoyed by all in the parish. Also, thanks to Drummonds, The Pumpkin Patch, and S&A who kindly supported the Jubilee event.

Public Rights of Way

On behalf of the Parish Council, and all parishioners, I would like to thank Sally Postlewhaite, our footpath Officer, for her dedication to maintain and improving the Public Right of Way network in Marden.

We must also thank Landowners for their cooperation, the Locality Steward, the Parish Clerk (past and present) and the General Public. Marden's Footpaths continue to improve dramatically, although there is always more to do. The highlights are:

Completed

1. In the last year new stiles have been installed on MR45 on the Church side of the River Lugg, MR8, MR18B and MR32.
2. Five new Kissing Gates are now in use on MR5 (South) x 2 and MR36 x 3. Wooden steps have been made down the steep slope to the road on MR5 and a new handrail improves safety.
3. MR 18B Landowner has built a new sturdy wooden step, by the original stone way marker, which makes access much easier.
4. Landowners have erected signs at either end of the MR12 Bridleway which have so far stopped illegal traffic using the lane.
5. Hedges around stiles have been trimmed and Landowners have started making 1 metre paths through their crops.

Work in progress

1. Still awaiting wooden stiles to be replaced on MR7A and MR45 (near Brook Farm).
2. MR18A PROW completed and awaiting three wooden planks to replace the rotten ones.
3. New Finger signs required for MR22, MR5, MR29 and MR42.
4. MR17A CLOSED Awaiting completion of work on drainage hole, installation of 3 Kissing gates and a three-plank bridge with rails.
5. Request by Landowners on MR34 for 2 Kissing gates.
6. MR5 PROW completed. Awaiting replacement of rotten wooden footplate.

Tree Warden

In recent months we have agreed the appointment of a Tree Warden, a position that has been vacant for some years.

In conclusion

I would like to thank councillors and working group members who give their time voluntarily, a warm welcome to the new Clerk who will ensure the Council runs smoothly and lawfully, a special thank you to Kema Guthrie, our retiring Ward Councillor, who has supported many of our causes, those parishioners who continue to volunteer to be part of the Parish support network, our footpath officer and her helpers, the newly appointed Tree Warden and, finally, you, our parishioners, for your ongoing support.

6. Report from Marden Recreation Ground Trust

Mr Mike Williams presented his report.

It was very much business as usual in 2022/23 with the football facilities well used by local and representative teams. Throughout the year Trustees became increasingly aware of the issues of safe car parking and clashes with Community Centre activities when well supported football matches were taking place. Consequently, it is the intention to reduce the number of football fixtures in 2023/24 and to ensure the facility remains available for recreational use for much of the weekend.

Trustees met during the year and conversations focused on whether secure storage for equipment was required and whether a revised application for ball stop fencing was appropriate. No further progress has been made on these items.

The significant project since the last report was the erection of new tennis court fencing. This was completed successfully. In time it is hoped that the surfacing to the tennis court can be upgraded also. Trustees undertook the work to remove the old fencing to save on project costs.

The play equipment receives a formal inspection annually and Trustees undertake regular interim inspections. The equipment remains in generally good condition and is well used.

No major projects are planned for the forthcoming year. Ongoing routine maintenance will be undertaken by Trustees with help from contractors as required.

Insurance cover for the facility is provided.

The current balance at the bank is £14,000 with £400 of football pitch hire due.

7. Report from Marden Village Trust.

Mrs Jess Tidball presented their report.

The year of 2022 started with monthly meetings from January to March this was because of Government Guidelines relating to the Covid situation were still being updated and followed. This restricted the timings and evening uses of the main hall and led to some user groups not being able to have the previous bookings as before resulting in them deciding to leave and use other community premises some moving to daytime bookings. The Covid restrictions were gradually lifted, and confidence began to build and bookings increased. The daytime booking situation could not be resolved due to the shared premises being off limits during the day due to the Child Protection Laws and the protection of the academy pupils. Fortunately, the new Parish Hub was chosen as a polling station so that the academy did not have to close for a day.

The result of the increase of the precept poll was a negative one and reports from the public consultation were given to the MVT. The MVT responded in their January meeting to the feedback, and these are highlighted in the minutes.

The CIO was briefly discussed at every meeting but progress on this was slow and will hopefully be addressed this year.

Maintenance problems were mainly about areas becoming worn out and dated. Such as toilets, decoration, flooring, heating, doors and poorly constructed kitchen areas and plumbing. Some of these matters were addressed during the year and others are still ongoing. Other problems arising were to do with car parking issues and the ongoing problem of some user groups still not cleaning properly after use and broken blinds being replaced.

Meetings continued in September and November with the AGM being held on 21st November.

Five of the present trustees were re-elected one stood down and another new Trustee was elected leaving 6 members of the MVT. Only 2 parishioners attended the AGM.

Financially due to the Covid grants and the increased bookings the situation is stable and therefore no increase in rented fees occurred.

8. Report from Marden Consolidated Charities.

Mrs Jane Keating was unable to attend the meeting but submitted a written report which was read out by the chair.

Marden Consolidated Charities is a very old charity established in the 17th century to provide grants and one-off help to parishioners in sudden or specific real financial need.

We held our AGM in March 2023. We did not make any grants during the year.

The charity is administered by village trustees and the chairperson is Rev Paul Roberts. The other trustees are Mr John Ashcroft, Mrs Jean Price, Mrs Janet Hewlett, Mrs Jenny Thomas and Mrs Jane Keating.

Mrs Jane Keating, Secretary, is currently living outside the parish but is prepared to remain as secretary until she has a permanent address. In the event that is outside the parish she will need to resign, and the Parish Council will need to appoint a new secretary.

9. Open Public Session.

The chair opened the meeting for questions from members of the public, there were none.

The Chair closed the meeting at 7.25pm

Signed:

Date: